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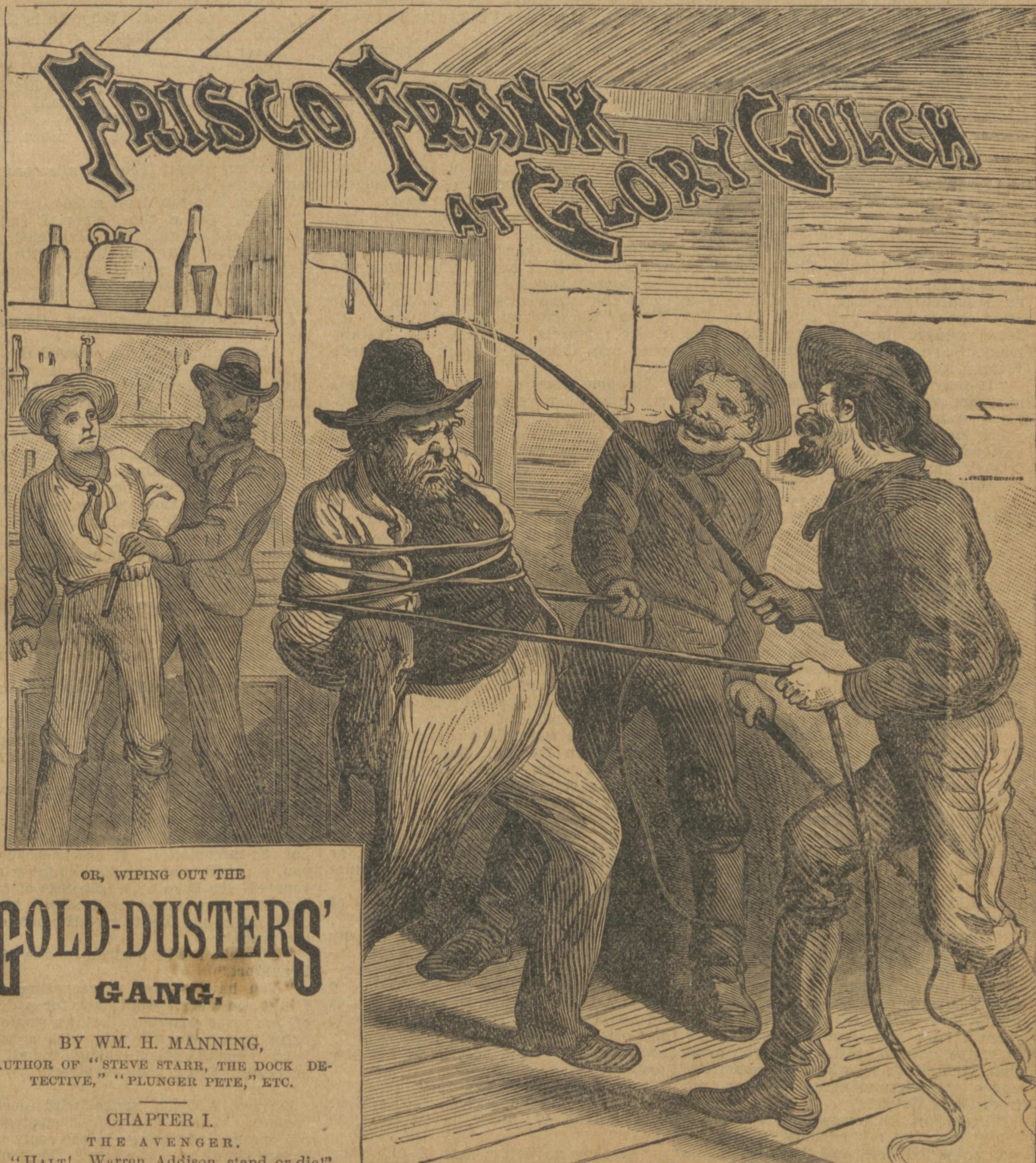
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OR, WIPING OUT THE

GOLD-DUSTERS' GANG.

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "STEVE STARR, THE DOCK DE-
TECTIVE," "PLUNGER PETE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE AVENGER.

"HALT! Warren Addison, stand or die!"
"What, you bar my way? you menace me
with a revolver? What madness possesses

BAD BENSON, SNARED LIKE AN UGLY SPIDER, STRUGGLED TO FREE HIS ARMS.
"LET ME GO! LET ME GO! I'LL KILL THE WHOLE COWARDLY LOT O' YOU!"

you? Do you know where you are at present?"

"A few hundred rods from the camp of Glory Gulch."

"Do you know that place?"

"Somewhat. As I stand here I can see the smoke rising from where the camp nestles among the hills and gulches. Above it tower the peaks of the mountains of California. They are almost untrodden and wholly trackless mountains, with a mining camp scattered here and there, some ten or twenty miles apart, and oftener more. Do I describe it well?"

"You evade the point. What I mean is, do you know the reputation of Glory Gulch? It is a law-abiding place, and this talk of shooting is but a silly menace. Put up that revolver!"

"Presently, sir, presently! My object is accomplished in part. You have stayed to hear me speak."

"You need not have taken that manner of doing it."

"I preferred my own way. It did me good to point the weapon at you and fancy what would be the result if I pulled the trigger—so!"

"Reckless fool! You raise the revolver again! Stop it! But why should I care? Blaze away, if you want to!"

"Do you care so little for your life?"

"I care not an ounce of gold-dust."

"You take a strange stand, Warren Addison."

"Again my name! Who are you that knows me so well?"

"Have you no eyes?"

"I have the eyes, but the sight is almost useless, I admit. If I ever knew you, I do not recognize you now."

"Turn your thoughts back, Warren Addison. Of all men you should remember me the first. Of all men I know you best. Best, did I say? Worst would be more truthful. We have met before; I have shared your bed, drank with you after the days of toil, eaten from the same meagre fare, known the same friends—aye, known the same persons, Warren Addison."

"It may be so. Your voice rings in my ears with marked familiarity, but my eyes are dim. I am a young man in years, but body and mind are old—so old that you may level the revolver and fire. It may hurt my flesh; it will not hurt my mind. Fire!"

"Not so; I have more to say to you. Yonder lies Glory Gulch. It is years since I have walked its streets; but once I was there every day. Nobody knew it better. I was a Glory camper of the early days. Your face still expresses perplexity. Let me be more explicit."

"Speak!"

"I knew you well. Men knew me, too, and my reputation was of the best. I was a beardless boy, almost; but I had my way to make in the world, and my reputation was much to me. You took it away. You lied away all I had."

"Man, you are crazy. Who are you?"

"I was owner of Claim 10."

"What! Are you Frisco Frank?"

"I am John Frankfort."

"Ah!"

"You are startled! You back off! Your color changes!"

"I did not think to see you here."

"I am come. I see you have heard of me. Men never thought of calling me Frisco Frank when I was in Glory Gulch before."

"I have heard that you were a detective in San Francisco, and known as Frisco Frank."

"You heard right. Ever since I left here I have been in the city in some capacity, as a worker for the law. For five years I have had some reputation as a detective, and under the name you mention. Odd, isn't it, when we remember under what circumstances you drove me from Glory Gulch?"

"Frankfort, that was long ago."

"It was; but my memory is keen. I was respected here, and there was some hope of wealth in Claim 10. You ac-

cused me—slyly, so as to hide your part in it—of robbing other mines. Judge Lynch tried me; but judge and jury were tolerably fair. They found the charge not proven; but I was ordered from camp. I went, only staying to sell my claim. I never have set foot here since. Now, I am back. Can you guess why?"

"You have threatened my life. I suppose you are here to kill me."

"You speak calmly."

"That is because I care little for my life. What does it matter? A little time more or less. I ask only one favor of you."

"What is that?"

"Give me a little time."

"To get back to camp and send men to arrest me?"

"No. I will not do a thing to offset your purpose. If you wish to remain unknown, I will tell no man who you are. If they are as slow to recognize you as I have been you are safe. Give me that morsel of time and then—do as you will."

"What do you wish to do in the mean while?"

"I cannot tell you. Let it suffice that I desire the reprieve. If you are not disposed to grant what I ask, why, fire away now!"

Warren Addison folded his arms and stood immovable. Frisco Frank was slow with his reply, and both stood inactive. They were by the side of a gulch which cut deeply into a ridge that led away from the camp of Glory Gulch, so called. It was a wild place, and there was not much danger of interruption. Nobody would come there on business, and idlers were not likely to do so.

Back of Addison was the place that was home to him. It was a mining settlement more than ten years old; but it never would be more. The region was too barren for ordinary purposes. Beyond the camp arose the peaks of the Sierra Nevada range, bristling with rocky ramparts. It was wild Nature, with man there as a speck on Nature's face.

In some parts of these foothills were mines which were worked with all modern appliances. It was the only industry of the region, except such as had sprung up to cater to the camp and to do its small business.

Frisco Frank was curious to see the place. He had been long away; he was now returning, with a definite purpose in view. As luck would have it, he had met an old enemy before entering the town. He had come to talk with the man, somewhere! he gladly accepted the chance to do it promptly.

The pause grew long. It might have continued much further, but John Frankfort finally spoke again.

"You and I," he added, "know why I was hounded out of this place. It was false that I had meddled with any man's money or dust, and you knew it well. That charge was only a cover for a purpose hidden from all but me. Peter West, the miner, had a daughter. You sought to ruin me in the estimation of Dorothy West."

"Nonsense, Frankfort."

"Why deny it? Do I rave over it? Am I like one given up to despair, or mad with rage? Have I not been quiet all these years? Bear that in mind."

"If you are reconciled to the loss of Dorothy West, why speak of it now?"

"Because stories have come to my ears in far Frisco that aroused my indignation—not for myself, but for her—for Dorothy. She cast me off. Well, so be it; but she is a woman still, and with no one to care for her and her interests but old Peter West, aged, weak of body and of mind. I am here to be her protector."

"Does she need one?"

"You should know best. Peter West owns Claim 47. What is it worth in dust?"

"It pays no better than it did when you were here. That means, it pays just

enough to keep body and soul together with father and daughter."

"Yet Peter keeps on working it?"

"Yes."

"Unfortunate Peter! Unfortunate Dorothy! She suffers because he lacks mental equilibrium. If he had been content to go forth with pick and spade, and work alone as a surface miner, all might have been well with the Wests; but he was not content with such a humble lot. He was uneducated alike in books and mines, and he grew ambitious to emulate those who owned big mines."

"This is all history."

"Have patience with me. I want to let you see how well I know the history of Glory Gulch since I left here. Peter took up with Claim 47—a piece of ground everybody else had rejected. He has been working at it ever since. He has never made it pay, but the more ill luck he had the more he stuck to his mine. He has put in expensive machinery and worked Claim 47, as if it was a bonanza to him every day. What is he worth in dollars and cents?"

"Nothing."

"Is he square?"

"I think not."

"I know he is not. Why, he is thousands of dollars in debt."

"I fear that is true."

"Fear!" echoed Frisco Frank, with sudden bitterness flashing into his former cool deliberation. "Fear! The word becomes you well!"

"Why shouldn't I use it? Have I no heart?"

"Not an atom. You are a scoundrel, remorseless and cunning."

Warren Addison drew a deep breath.

"There was a time when I should have resented that!" he exclaimed.

"You shall have all the chance you desire; but, like you, I ask for time—three minutes! When it is up—well, I have a suggestion to make to you."

Addison shook his head and said nothing.

"The plain fact is," proceeded the detective, "that Peter West is simple-minded and always was. He has gone daft over Claim 47, and has persisted in working it when such a course was seen by all to be madness. Why nobody put him under a guardian I don't know; but, maybe, the restraining influence was the same that led Peter on—led him on to sink more and more money, sir. What is the result? He and Dorothy are beggars, and there is no hope of ever paying out the big sum of money that somebody has allowed Peter to borrow. Who has loaned to him?"

"You seem to be telling the story. Who has?"

"You!"

"Why should I do such a mad thing?"

"To reduce Dorothy to beggary, and then get her into your power. She knows as well as I do that it would kill old Peter to stop him from catering to his hobby—to stop his work on Claim 47. That has been the plot all along."

"Why do you say I have done this rash loaning?"

"My informant could not tell me who had supplied the money; but I needed not the information. It has been you!—you, sir, with your fiendish cunning and your bid for Dorothy, regardless of cost. My informant could well afford to be ignorant of the identity of the snake in the grass."

"All this I will answer in due time, Frankfort."

"You have spoken of resenting this. I told you then I would ask for a delay of but three minutes. Let us waste no extra time. We are here with a small level along the gulch—enough for all our purposes. Draw your revolver!"

"No!"

Warren Addison spoke with perfect coolness. There was such a suggestion of supreme indifference in the reply that Frisco Frank was staggered. He looked searchingly at his old enemy.

"Where has your spirit gone?" he finally demanded.

"With my strength. Don't hurry this, Frankfort. Give me the reprieve I have asked for, and, in the mean while, keep on to Glory Gulch and see what sort of a situation you find there. If I misused you once—if I did, I say—it may be that you are on the wrong track, now. Go to the camp before you do anything rash."

"What shall I find there?"

"Enough, if you hunt for it. I do not hate you so much, but what I say—you are a detective—go to the camp and use your skill there."

CHAPTER II.

THE RIDER FROM BUZZ-SAW.

Frisco Frank looked curiously at his companion, but he learned nothing from the scrutiny.

"What is there for me to find at the camp?" he asked.

"Perhaps nothing; possibly a good deal."

"Your answer is far from being satisfactory. I am not here to deal with myths or dreams. The settlement with you is my full business."

"Again I say, give me a little time—"

"To run away?" bluntly demanded the detective.

"Not one step shall I run, and I will explain why in good time. You will find me when wanted. Go on to Glory Gulch and be patient. Rest assured, you will have all the chance you desire for your work."

"Do you think the other citizens will be as slow to recognize me as you were?"

"Very doubtful. When you were here you were a young man; now you are past thirty. I cannot say how much you have changed in personal appearance, but, though time and stirring experiences must have done much for you, the men of this camp have always had you in mind. Your reputation as a detective has traveled far, and much we have wondered that the man who left town under the ban of our people should have risen to such lofty heights. California calls you 'The Veteran Detective,' not because you are old in years, but because you have seen a decade in that line and made a remarkable record for skill, success and rough experience with dangerous criminals. You are a veteran in spite of your lack of old age."

"You seem to have kept close track of me, yet you did not recognize me when I appeared to you just now."

"There is a reason for this, John Frankfort. Look critically at me. Do I seem like a well man?"

"Hardly, I should say."

"I am near to death."

"You are still young."

"When Death marks a man as a victim youth avails nothing. You wonder at my lack of recognition. Know, then, that my eye-sight is so poor that it is no wonder at all. To me, as we stand here, you are little more than a dark shape. I should not know a neighbor except by his voice."

Frisco Frank was silent. His eyes were of the best, and he studied Addison's face sharply. The signs went to corroborate the man's claim. He did look like a sick man, and Frankfort was compelled to believe he was sincere, though whether there was an exaggeration he could not say.

Addison leaned heavily on his staff.

"Have you more to say?" he inquired, presently.

"Do you wish to return to the camp?"

"Yes."

"Go, then. I will see you again."

"Call on me there. When I am ready to see you I will send word. It may be to-morrow—what is the hour?"

"Seven o'clock."

"It may be to-morrow."

Frankfort failed to see the connection of these words, but he did not say as much, and, after a pause Addison added:

"I will see you soon—very soon. Just how much I will tell you of things unknown to you I can't say now; I must

have time to think this over. Perhaps I shall startle and surprise you. We will see. Our interview shall not be delayed long. I may send for you to-morrow. Seven o'clock eh? I must back to town."

With this he turned and moved down the slope. His steps were slow and weak, and he surely had the manner of a sick man. Frankfort looked after him with growing curiosity.

"I don't understand the matter," muttered the man from Frisco. "He is not at all like the Addison I used to know. Has his malevolence gone out with his strength, as he said? Well, I'll know soon. I'll go to the camp, and when there I shall have business on hand at all times."

Wheeling, he made his way among the rocks for a few rods and then arrived at where a horse stood between two boulders. It was his own property, and a fine animal in every way.

There were two ways of getting to Glory Gulch from the outer world. One was by stage from Buckshot Bar, where connection was made with the railroad. This was the route used by those who traveled with money and heed for show. The second course was across the range from the camps to the westward, where the foothills were lower and the air of civilization a little more pronounced.

It was by the latter course that Frankfort had come. It was a line that brought fully one-half of the travelers into town, and free from all restrictions, since those who used it had to supply their own means of locomotion, and, as there was but one, it was not an unusual circumstance to see horsemen winding along the rough trail.

Thus it was that as Frisco Frank lingered by his own steed, stroking his neck without being fully conscious of what he was doing, so deeply was he thinking, he heard the sound of a horse's feet on the rocks and, moving a step to gain better view, saw a rider come along the so-called Stone-Bruise Trail—the way he had lately approached himself.

The new arrival was not of the plain, sober fashion of the detective in any manner.

He was about thirty years old, of medium height and muscular development, but he did not seem like one who had wrested his daily bread from California's auriferous soil. Men like him the observer had often seen in San Francisco, but less frequently in the mining district.

He was elaborately clad in rich clothing, and, as a rule, this attire followed the system of civilization, but there were departures of striking and becoming nature.

On the whole he was something of a dandy and his flaxen hair and yellow mustache would have made him look effeminate if there had not been redeeming traits—namely, a brace of revolvers in a fancy belt attached to his waist, and a face that was full of firmness and fire.

"A sport!"

Frisco Frank knew the class, and he sought no further for light as to this traveler of Stone-Bruise Trail.

The detective was not seen in return, and the stranger passed on and disappeared around a bend in the trail.

Frankfort still lingered. His gaze often strayed toward the remoter part of the trail, but darkness fell and left him watching. The moon climbed above a peak and cast its light down on the lower elevations, but, though it touched the middle line of the trail, Frisco Frank was still in the shadows.

Finally he became impatient.

"I'll watch no more!" he exclaimed.

"I may as well go on to the camp and attend to my own business. Others can see to theirs. Come, Ebony!"

He swung himself into the saddle and was about to emerge from his place of concealment when another sound came to his ears. He bent his head and listened.

"Another horseman on the trail. I will see who he is. He comes at a hard gallop, as if with business of importance on hand. It may be—Ah! here he comes!"

The pounding feet had drawn nearer, and a horse dashed along the depression where the ribbon of light fell upon him and his rider. Frisco Frank nodded with satisfaction.

"Here he is!"

If he had watched for the man he did not wish to intercept him. He saw a youth of slight figure for a few seconds; then the horse shot around the curve and was gone toward Glory Gulch.

"The same stripling who was abbreviated Little Alf in Buzz-saw Valley. He has secured his horse, after all—more, he has ridden him hard. He nears the camp, and I will go on and learn why he was in such desperate haste to get there. Forward, Ebony!"

The detective rode out of the pocket and pressed on his way. He did not want this beardless boy from Buzz-saw to know he was followed, so he hung back enough to remain undiscovered, yet kept close enough to watch him in his remaining journey.

Glory Gulch was but a short distance off. The glitter of its lights was soon seen, and it was a familiar view to the man who had once owned Claim 10. There had been steady growth since his day, but most of the old structures were there—the shanties that had been the camp in his day—for the growth had been on the outskirts.

There was one hotel, and one, only, and this was so rendered conspicuous by numerous lights that any stranger, seeking the business center, would invariably go there.

Little Alf clattered up to the door, and Frankfort saw him toss the rein to a hostler, leap to the ground and make for the interior.

The detective finished up his own journey with haste, went through the same ceremony and was speedily inside the hotel.

At one glance he took in the appearance of room and occupants. He saw a bar, with men leaning upon it and grouped in front of it; but out of the whole crowd his eyes singled out two as conspicuous.

The Sport of the Trail leaned upon the bar itself, cool, careless and rather handsome, while Little Alf was a few feet from him, pen in hand, facing the clerk.

"Any sort of a room will do me," the youth was saying, his voice clear, keen and acute; "and, as for supper, it is only a passing event to me. I want to ask you a question: Has the stage arrived to-day?"

"Got in a full hour ago."

"Always due at dark, this time of year, and always on time."

This was an interruption. It came from a lank man who held a whip in one hand and a lasso in the other. He had all of the appearances of a driver, and this tribute to the punctuality of the stage easily proclaimed him its pilot. A man by his side, who carried another whip, echoed the last words:

"Always on time!"

The attention of Little Alf had been diverted. He gave the men a swift glance, and then impatience and disgust marked his expression. He turned quickly back to the clerk.

"Who came on that stage to-night?"

"There were several."

"Was there a man—a man—"

Plainly the youth intended to add something, but his utterance died away strangely.

"There were several men," replied the clerk.

"Who?"

The clerk slapped the register heavily.

"Well, there's the names," he replied, none too amiably.

"I have looked; but the name—the writing—were there no more than those here recorded?"

"Of course such as were citizens did not come here at all."

"I should have remembered—Not recorded. The name is not there."

Frisco Frank was watching and listening. He had seen Little Alf in Buzz-

saw, and there the youth had been nervous and erratic. He was not over it yet, and his indirectness in asking what might have been a simple question was noticeable to one who had previously gained a line on his ways.

Very few were taking any heed of him. The majority of persons present had things of more importance to them than listening to a beardless boy whose greatest concern seemed to be that he wanted to know what passengers Sol Jennison had brought to town; but all did not seem so unconcerned.

A man on the outskirts of the crowd moved closer to Little Alf, and when Frisco Frank had seen him once he was not disposed to forget him. A man of middle age, not tall but of tremendous width of chest, and with arms like a gladiator's, he was dressed shabbily and in sore need of soap and water.

All this was nothing in Glory Gulch, but when Frankfort noted his face he felt a curious thrill of repulsion. It was a broad, coarse, animal face, roughly bewhiskered, and over all was an expression of cruelty and surly ferocity that was impressive even when kept under control.

"A human brute!" thought the detective. "Why does he listen so raptly to Little Alf?"

"Bad Benson wants another drink!"

The remark was made by one citizen to another; but he nodded so unmistakably toward the fellow with the ox-like chest and shoulders that Frankfort knew who was meant. He had the name of the giant.

He had yet to learn why Bad Benson looked so evilly at Little Alf.

CHAPTER III.

BAD BENSON BREAKS LOOSE.

The stripling from Buzz-saw was still talking with the clerk, but not only was his manner preoccupied, but he talked so much at random that the man behind the register was looking at him with dissatisfaction. It was the fashion at Glory Gulch to talk to the point, and even the chance of getting hard dollars from the youthful stranger did not make his ways agreeable to the clerk.

Little Alf was thinking intently. That was plain, and he suddenly broke in upon a sentence that was being spoken by the clerk, with the abrupt statement:

"I want somebody who can give me the names of every person who came on the stage, and tell where every stranger went to who was of that party!"

With this Little Alf wheeled suddenly.

Ordinarily this would have been of but little consequence; but now, as Frisco Frank had previously seen, Bad Benson was at hand. The tough had been edging toward Little Alf, and, as Frank noted the threatening gleam in his eyes, he, too, had come somewhat closer. He had thought that the slight traveler might need aid, though why he should was not clear.

Little Alf turned at the wrong moment, and, as a consequence, he collided lightly with Bad Benson. It was one of the slight mishaps that often occurred and nearly as frequently passed unnoticed even in Glory Gulch; but it was different now.

A snarl of rage escaped Bad Benson's lips.

"What ther blazes you mean?" he cried; "want to have a muss with me? Think you kin whack me around that way? Wal, you can't, by Judas! I kin take keer o' myself. Do yer hear me?"

It was easy enough to hear him, for he spoke in reverberating tones; but he was still further impressing his presence upon the clearly surprised traveler from the Buzz-saw Trail. He had seized Little Alf and was shaking him and glaring upon him in all his vindictiveness.

The grip of his muscular hand hurt, and it proved that his slight opponent was not disposed to endure such treatment with meekness. The small hand of the youth was doubled up; it shot for-

ward and planted a stinging blow on the bully's face.

"Let me go, you scoundrel!" he exclaimed.

Bad Benson howled again. He had been hurt as a stroke from a larger man would not have hurt him; there was a sting to the small fist which maddened him.

"So, that's yer game!" he shouted. "Wal, I'll show ye my game, too!"

From his pocket he whipped out a revolver, and, if the motion was not fully decisive, his looks were. Frisco Frank knew that Little Alf's life was in danger, and the detective started to the aid of the smaller man. Somebody else was nearer and fully as active.

The Handsome Sport had been close to the stage-driver and his companion, and with remarkable celerity he snatched the lasso from the driver's hand and flung its center over Bad Benson's head.

It fell squarely, checking the motion of the revolver and flinging that weapon a dozen of feet away; then, before Benson fully realized the situation, the sport had taken another spurt, and, by dexterous manipulation, had added several snake-like coils, until Bad Benson was completely enmeshed.

Glory Gulch was yet to learn fully that the sport was remarkably quick of motion, but they had a hint of it then.

Next, he pulled backward, and, as the rope tightened, the burly tough was for the time being out of the race.

Nobody in camp liked Benson, and it just suited the whim of the stage-driver and his friend to aid in the work. They caught each an end of the rope, pulling stoutly, and making the victory doubly certain. The sport seemed content to let Benson escape or keep in trouble as he liked, and he stepped back, abandoning the work he had begun, but holding his hands in his pockets in a suggestive way.

Little Alf was not idle. He had pluck in plenty, and the moment he was released he drew a revolver and faced Benson with flashing eyes and apparent willingness to settle the score then and there; but a bystander caught his wrist and prevented any rash action on his part.

Bad Benson snared, like an ugly spider, first struggled to free his arms, and then twisted around so that he faced the men with the rope. His face expressed his mad anger, but his captors laughed openly and held fast.

"Let me go!" he bellowed. "Let me go, or I'll kill ye!"

"Give him a taste of the whips!" suggested a looker-on.

"Let me go! Let me go! I'll kill the whole cowardly lot o' ye!"

He strained at the rope; but even his great strength could not break it, and it was held so taut that he could not get his hands free.

He was taken seriously by many, but others had seen so much of wild life that it was regarded as more of a joke than anything else, even with the man in such a rage. How this could be so, with his nature expressed on his face, was not clear; and Frisco Frank, willingly letting others attend to the case, felt that it was not well to trifle with Bad Benson.

Little Alf, held back and out of the race, looked upon the struggling bully with a bold front, and it seemed that he was ready to have it out with Benson.

"Oh! if I could get at ye!" grated the captive. "Ef I could I'd fight the whole lot in the room—"

Once more the sport stepped forward.

"Men!" he commanded, "cast off that lasso!"

"You put it on," reminded the stage-driver.

"Then, I'll take it off."

The sport seized the rope, loosened it in his aids' hands and whirled it wholly aside. Bad Benson was free again. The sport stood within a few feet of him.

"You have your wish," he deliberately remarked. "The rope is off. What are you going to do about it?"

It was the question of a man who could look out for himself in any and all phases of life. Even Bad Benson realized that, and the headlong ferocity somehow faded away from his face. He stood and looked at the sport, but more in bewilderment than anything else.

The latter did not move, and his manner was quiet and cool, but Frisco Frank noted a watchfulness that told its own story.

The sport was fully capable of caring for himself.

This fact was clear even to Benson, and it acted upon him forcibly. He was a mere bully, with a record that should have landed him in prison—or out of the world—before then; but he had somehow held his own at Glory Gulch, and kept his freedom. He had used his immunity from punishment to the terror of others, and there was general wonder to see him so meek now.

"Say, who be you?" he asked, in a low growl.

"My name is Robert Rover," the sport replied.

"What more?"

"There is no more. I have told my name because it pleased me to do it, not to oblige you. I shall tell no more. My history is none of your business."

Bad Benson winked rapidly.

"Do ye know what ye've done?" he inquired, beginning to recover his spirits.

"Do I look as if I had been asleep?" retorted Rover, coolly.

"You interfered with my business."

"I believe I did."

"I don't allow any man ter do that—not an' live!"

"I have no intention of dying."

"Do ye know who I be?"

"No, and I don't care a rap."

"I'm Benson!"

"A matter of indifference to me."

"You interfered with me, and I allow no man ter do it—"

"You are repeating yourself. Drop that! A remark from your lips is not sweet-scented enough to make it endurable twice. As near as I can glean from your rambling talk you don't like my style. Well, what are you going to do about it?"

Robert Rover stepped closer to Bad Benson, and he seemed to grow taller as he did so. He was quiet and cool, but there were men in that party who were old fighters who arrived at the conclusion that they did not want trouble with Robert, themselves.

Frisco Frank was an officer of law, but he was aware that he was back in the mines. Being there, he did not wish to turn Glory Gulch into a town of silence. He could not do it, and if tried he would only get himself into ill repute. He remained quiet, but he decided that there was a fair-sized chance that Bad Benson would get his last hurt within a few minutes.

It was at this critical juncture that there was an interruption. A man rushed into the room, broke through the group, and reached its center. He was panting, as if after a hard run.

"Quick, quick!" he gasped.

"What's up?" asked a citizen.

"A man has been killed!"

"Where?"

"Up on the West Slope."

"Who did it?"

"I don't know, but it is at Warren Addison's house. Terrible things have happened there. Didn't you hear anything? Come quickly! Murder has been done there!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE WEST SLOPE TRAGEDY.

Frisco Frank had lost no part of this dialogue. He had nothing to say, as yet, but he was interested. The manner of the man who had brought the news was enough to indicate that the death was not of the ordinary kind, and the detective had looked for a tragedy from the time of the first announcement.

The final words capped the climax—

it was at Warren Addison's house, and murder had been done.

Glory Gulch was a law-abiding place, as a rule, and the hearers were universally thrown into a state of excitement.

"Who's killed?" was the excited question of the messenger.

"Addison's brother."

"What! the chap who just got here to-night?"

"Yes."

"He came on the stage not two hours ago."

"He never will go away on the stage—not alive."

"Who killed him?"

"It is all a mystery."

"What does Warren Addison know about it?"

"He is too badly hurt to say."

"Then he was attacked, too?"

"The explosion did it."

"What explosion?"

"Didn't you hear it? Powder in the house blew up—some think it was by design, and done by the slayer. The explosion served Warren nearly as bad as the assassin did his brother."

"Who is up there?"

"Doctor Gifford is in charge. He has sent me for help. His orders are that all turn out to hunt for the slayer. Somebody come and did the deed like a coward, but the doctor thinks he must be near. He says to me, 'Tell the men to scatter and search! Let them look everywhere!—let them hunt the wretch down!' That's what Gifford says."

"And we are here like a lot of stones. Come on, boys!"

The man who had suggested this made the start, and others were not slow to follow. There was a quick emptying of the room, and all who went seemed to feel eager in the cause of justice.

The recent quarrel was dropped even by Bad Benson.

Frisko Frank was not backward in this crisis. He had no knowledge of a brother of Warren Addison, but in the latter he was interested, so he determined to be on the scene quickly.

The crowd, as a whole, took the direction which, as it proved, was that where lay Addison's house. Frankfort found himself near the messenger, and he improved the chance to speak with him further.

"When did this happen?"

"Must have been nearly an hour ago."

"Why has not the alarm been given quicker?"

"We have been working over Warren."

"Do you live with him?"

"Do I? Well, I guess not. I live with myself. I am a neighbor, though, and I turned to and gave my aid."

"What about the explosion?"

"I reckon the murderer did it."

"Is the house wrecked?"

"Not a bit of it. Only one room was injured, and that was the one where the brothers were."

"I never heard of this brother—the murdered man."

"He only got in to-night. Warren sent for him, you see, and he came on the stage. It was a sad reunion, for he is dead and Warren isn't much better."

Frankfort had more questions he wished to ask, but the messenger was too much out of breath to talk, and the party raced off up the hill without more information.

They were soon in a vicinity which had been unsettled in Frankfort's former residence there. Houses had sprung up since, and they were the best in Glory Gulch. "The West Slope," in that section, meant the aristocracy of the camp, such as it was.

As they ascended the steep ridge Frisko Frank noticed that Robert Rover was of the party. The sport was fleet of foot, and he kept well at the front. Now and then the detective could see his face, and when it was so, its marked placidity impressed him. Few of the party were wholly calm, but Robert Rover was one of them.

Looking for others who had figured prominently at the hotel, Frank failed to discover them, and this led to a mental query on his part—Had presence at the hotel served as an alibi in case there proved to be doubt as to the identity of the slayer?

Clearly, if the time of the deed had been correctly given, no such alibi could be established for anybody who had been there, for time enough had elapsed to enable the perpetrator to make such a change of base. This line of meditation was purely mechanical with the detective; he had no theories as yet, and certainly none that pointed to any particular person.

Well up on the West Slope the moving crowd found another crowd gathered by a building. It was a scene of activity all around. Those in the street surged to and fro, and there was constant action within the building.

Frisko Frank looked the place over quickly. It was a neat dwelling-house, and of unusual size for a town like Glory Gulch. If it was Warren Addison's house he had lived well.

The propensity of all to crowd indoors had led to the denial of access to those who came later, and, as a result, the detachment from the hotel brought up at an impassable barrier.

All they could do was to question those who had been there before, and Frankfort stood silent and listened to the dialogue.

"Who has been killed?"

"Warren Addison's brother."

"I didn't know he had a brother."

"Then you must have been mining in the woods. His brother Homer came to camp to-day, and now he's dead—and dead only an hour or so after he arrived."

"Who did it?"

"Nobody knows. The assassin escaped."

"Was it done in this house?"

"Yes."

"Can't Warren explain anything?"

"He is too badly hurt, himself. He is in a room, with Doctor Gifford working over him to save his life."

"I thought the doctor was out of town."

"He went East to bring Homer Addison here. They came in on the stage to-night. They stopped at the hotel for awhile, and then went on to Warren's."

"Then Warren didn't meet them at the hotel?"

"No, he was too sick. You know he has been in ill health for a long while, and the reason Homer came here was that he was the heir, for Warren knew he must die, and he wanted to settle his affairs before he crossed the last divide."

"So the brother has died before him?"

"Yes. He came here in good health, but he's gone off now. The assassin's knife removed the heir before the sick man died."

Frisko Frank had been silent, but he now spoke quietly. He had a question to ask.

"Who is the heir now?"

"I don't know. Any of you men know?"

There was a brief pause, and then several voices rose, with the confession that their owners had no knowledge as to the identity of the new heir. No wonder was expressed by any one, but Frankfort was doing some thinking. The stroke of the knife had removed an impediment from somebody's path. Who had benefited by the murder?

That might prove to be an important question.

Just then there was a new diversion. The outskirts of the crowd swayed noticeably, and then somebody came roughly elbowing his way to the front. Frisko Frank recognized Little Alf. The youth's face was strikingly pale, and there was a good deal expressed on that face—agitation, consternation, and dismay; how much more could not be told at a glance.

On came the boy until the compact crowd compelled him to stop most unwillingly.

"Where is he?—where is he?" Little Alf demanded.

"Where's who?" demanded a big miner, sharply.

"The man—the men!"

"Wal, hyer's some few o' them, I should say."

"But the others!—the ones the talk is all about?"

"The Addisons?"

"Yes."

"One o' them is gone ter a land that another sun lights, or wuss. The other brother is checkin' his trunks fer the same clime."

"Dead, both dead?"

Little Alf gasped these words, and then he shrunk back, with his face the picture of consternation and his eyes wildly staring.

"Only one dead so fer, lad," answered the miner, his own manner growing gentler as he watched the agitated youth.

"And he—he? Who is he?"

"Homer Addison."

"The man who came on the stage?"

"Yes."

"No, no! It can't be; I won't have it so. Dead? There is some mistake. You didn't know the man; he was a stranger here; why should you know him? There is a mistake of some sort. Call out his name! Summon him here! Shout for him!"

Little Alf flung his arms wildly, and the entire crowd were startled into silence. There was a variety of opinions as to the cause of this agitation, and some thought the youth was deranged, but Frisko Frank arrived at no such conclusion. Greatly wrought up the boy might be, but he was not deranged.

"Call!" he reiterated.

"What shall we call?"

"His name! Shout it in thunder tones. Shout!"

"He will answer only to Gabriel."

"We will see! I will call. I'll sound his name— Ah! his name, his name!"

Little Alf bent his head; then he suddenly straightened up, threw back that shapely head, and his voice rung out clear and piercing:

"Homer Addison! What, ho! come forth! Homer Addison, come! We call!—make answer! What, ho! Come! Come, even though it be from your grave!"

Wild, strange, and impressive was that call, and the big miner shrunk back, unconsciously.

"Mad!" he muttered. "Crazy as a March hare!"

Frisko Frank was strong of nerve, but he, too, was much moved by this remarkable incident. What did it mean? What secret was in the mind of the slight youth? But while all watched again came the call:

"Come forth! Homer Addison, this way! Come, come, come!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SHERIFF'S ACCOUNT.

Frisko Frank bestirred himself. The beardless youth was like a bird that vainly beats its wings against its cage, and he felt moved to use his superior years and wisdom for his aid. He pressed forward and touched Little Alf on the arm. The boy wheeled quickly.

"Friend," spoke Frankfort, mildly, "you waste your breath in this thing. Living or dead, the man you name is not likely to respond at such a moment. Are you a stranger here?"

"Yes."

"You have been rendered nervous by this affair. Control yourself, and remember where you are. You can do no good to hasten matters thus."

"Boy," added the miner, "do you mean that you knew Homer Addison?"

"Of course he did not know him," answered Frisko Frank, hurriedly. "It is nothing only he has been overtaken by something. Sickness often runs riot in the veins, and physical strength can endure only about so much. Little Alf, be calm!"

The speaker's manner was impressive, and the youth's wild eyes changed. His

gaze was upon his companion, and there was a sort of child-like submission. His tense muscles seemed to relax, and he sighted and seem to reel on his feet.

"Ah!" added Frisco Frank, "is somebody coming out of the house?"

Every one followed the direction of the intimation. They looked toward the door, and then the detective bent and softly whispered to Little Alf:

"Remember where you are! You cannot recall what has happened, and the only way to know what that happening has been is to wait. Be patient! Be strong! Watch! Listen! Guard your secrets!"

What these secrets were the adviser did not himself know, but he was averse to having Little Alf show his hand too plainly. The notion was fixed in Frankfort's mind that eventful scenes were yet to occur, and he was willing to hold the winning cards.

Little Alf was submissive, but the detective, turning a trifle when he saw that he had carried his point, found Robert Rover by his side. The handsome sport was mild and sympathetic.

"Partner," he remarked, to Frisco Frank, "your theories and ways are right, but, if this night's beginning is a north star to the future, there will be more calling in the future. We may yet all call, 'Come forth! Come, come!'"

It was an interpolation too vague to be solved, and before the detective could reply, another stir at the door betokened something of real importance there.

"It is Sheriff Dowe," exclaimed an observer. "Now we shall hear something about the case."

"Dowe must have come in by the rear. He hastened off to find the murderer—he's back, and that means that he has news from inside and out. Ha! he is about to speak! Listen!"

A big man who had appeared at the door was waving his hand, and the crowd became perfectly still.

"Men!" cried the sheriff. "Why do you stand here inactive? Why don't you get away on the track of the assassin?"

"Which way did he go?"

"I don't know. Nobody does. The only way is to start out and hunt everywhere."

"Sheriff, who did it?"

"I can't tell you, for I have no idea. It was done, and that is all that is known. The rest remains to be discovered."

"It won't do much good to go rushing about in this pitch darkness. He has had time to get out of sight, and he's done it. Sheriff, what do you know about it, anyhow?"

"You shall hear the story as I got it from Doctor Gifford and Mayor Everell. Gifford got back from the East to-night. He had been there, as most of you know, to bring Warren Addison's brother to Glory Gulch. Warren was to meet them at the hotel, for he had been expecting them for several nights, and had regularly met the stage, but this night he had a poor spell just before stage-time, and he didn't meet them at all.

"The result was that Doctor Gifford brought the brother up here alone. They came right to the house, and the doctor took Homer Addison in, and the brothers met.

"After a few minutes Gifford went away, for he had business of his own to attend to, you see. The brothers were left with nobody at hand but the housekeeper, old Agatha Beese.

"It so happened that, soon after, I had business with Oliver Gee, owner of the Best Lot Mine. I dropped in and found Gifford there. It was only a few minutes later when we heard an explosion. We went out on the street hurriedly. The explosion was unusual, and, though it might not mean anything wrong, we wanted to see what it was.

"We could see nothing unusual, so we fell to talking, but the doctor soon ex-

cused himself and went again to Addison's. Fifteen minutes later Gee and I walked the same way, but when we reached the front of this house, Gifford appeared at the door and called to us in great excitement.

"Then we heard the news. Homer Addison was dead and Warren was desperately injured.

"It was then thought that both had died by the explosion, which had been powder kept here by Warren, but it was soon found that life remained in Warren, and investigation proved that Homer had been murdered. Somebody, we know not who, did this vile deed, and it must be avenged.

"Men, I call upon you to act in this crisis. Do not stand here like posts. Get away on the trail. Search the whole camp, and see if any sign is found. My duty keeps me here now. You are not needed. I tell you once more, get away on the trail!"

The call was so urgent that most of the men obeyed. There was a general rush, and only ten persons stayed behind. One of the latter was Frisco Frank.

The sheriff did not at once return to the interior of the house, but he looked the crowd over critically.

"I want three of you in here to be witnesses to the way things look now. I will select—Hullo! what do you want?"

Little Alf had pressed forward excitedly.

"Let me be one!" he replied, eagerly.

"You—a beardless boy!"

"I can see as well as anybody."

"You are too nervous; you shake as if you had an ague. Keep back—I don't want you. Here, you three men nearest, come inside."

Frisco Frank heard the selection with interest. He had determined to be one of the party, even if he revealed his identity then and there, and he had gone close. The choice freed him from the necessity of argument, and he prepared to follow.

The sheriff had stepped back to admit them, but he suddenly grew angry. Little Alf had essayed to slip in past the men unseen, and the sheriff was obliged to check him with a heavy arm that was not used any too gently.

"Well, you are a persistent seeker for ghastly sights!" he exclaimed, irritably. "Get out of here before I bowl you over!"

He closed the door with a bang, locked it, and shut Little Alf out. Frisco Frank's last sight was of Robert Rover pressing close to the slight youth.

The detective let Little Alf and his affairs drop from his mind, and his professional zeal came to the front. He wanted to see the sights of this place of tragedy, and his ambition was not less because Warren Addison's brother figured in the affair.

"It is strange," he thought, "that the young man died so soon after getting here. I want to hear Warren explain it."

Warren was not visible where the investigators stood. They were in a large room, comfortably made, but with the strict plainness that predominated at Glory Gulch. Just then there were broken windows and blackened walls that told their own story.

"Here, gentlemen," explained the sheriff, "is where the explosion took place. Look around and see what is visible. Of course, there was not much powder to explode; a large quantity would have sent this building sailing skyward in small pieces. The actual quantity was just enough to break things up a little and severely injure Warren."

"Were both bodies here?" asked a witness.

"Yes."

"One dead, and the other—what was his condition?"

"He was unconscious."

"Do you think the explosion came right after the killing of the brother?"

"That we don't know."

"What does Warren Addison say?"

The last practical question was from Frisco Frank. He saw no need of theorizing if there was chance to get closer to the truth.

"He has not explained it."

"Why not?"

"His condition is too serious. Doctor Gifford is with him, working hard to save his life. He says it won't do for anybody to disturb Warren now."

"Should he not tell his story, and thus aid justice in finding the criminal?" added Frankfort.

"He will do so as soon as possible."

"And, in the meanwhile, opportunity will be given for escape."

"We have charge of that," stiffly replied the sheriff. "Now, gentlemen, I will show you the body."

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR OF GLORY GULCH.

The party of investigation entered an adjacent room. A light burned there, and three occupants had possession. Two were watchers; the third was the victim of the murder.

Not only the assassin, but the explosion had used him roughly. His clothing was scorched and blackened, and his hair singed, but the face had escaped with but little damage. Singularly peaceful was that face, when the violent end of the man was considered.

"Look!" directed the sheriff. "Here is the body of Homer Addison."

"That's right," agreed one of the investigators. "I saw him when he came in on the stage—that's Warren's brother, sure."

"He took a fatal journey when he came to Glory Gulch."

"Who could have killed him? He cannot have had any enemy here."

"He had time to make one."

"Then the enemy must have moved quickly to his work of revenge."

Thus talked the ordinary men of the party, but Frisco Frank did not heed them. He forgot all but professional zeal, and he moved forward and bent over the dead man. He found no difficulty in finding the fatal wound.

A deep gash on the neck told how the end had come.

"Killed by a hard, desperate blow," thought the detective. "It was delivered from behind, too. It is in the right side of his neck, just where a secret slayer would hit from the rear. The blade sunk deep, and life did not long linger. Probably he never spoke after he got that stroke. Why was it given?"

Sheriff Dowe considered himself the chief man present, and he had been so busy with his comments that he did not notice Frisco Frank especially. Now his attention came back, and he scowled when he saw the position of the detective.

"What are you doing?" he demanded, sharply.

"Looking at the wound," calmly replied Frankfort.

"Couldn't you wait until I got around to that?"

"I have not removed the wound," quietly answered Frisco Frank.

"Absurd! Who said you had? All I want is for you to remember what you see here, and be able to certify to the facts when you are called upon. I will call your attention to what is necessary."

The sheriff spoke with the air of a man who was trying to be patient with a stupid person, and Frisco Frank did not take the trouble to make the suggestion that perhaps he was as well qualified to speak with judgment as was the local official.

Dowe went on to call attention to such things as impressed him. It was a fairly good analysis of the plainest facts, but there was no real skill in his work. He missed the suggestion that the wound had been delivered from behind, and, also, a good many other things that were open to Frankfort's experienced gaze.

He had just finished when footsteps sounded, and the party turned quickly.

"Doctor Gifford!" murmured one of them.

For the first time the detective saw the man who had been so often referred to by name.

Gifford was about thirty-two years old. He was tall, well-formed, and well-dressed. There was nothing in his appearance that would have suggested that he was a doctor. He was more like a well-to-do man of the world, and of marked intelligence. He might have been a speculator, if looks had been considered.

Just then there was considerable perturbation in his manner, and he looked the investigation party over with quickly-moving glance.

"Doctor, how is Warren Addison?" asked the sheriff, hastily.

"He is a sick man," Gifford replied, shaking his head.

"What is the extent of his injuries?"

"He suffers from shock. He has no wound, and no injury further than what I have mentioned. That is quite enough, however—the shock of the explosion has fallen heavily upon his already weakened frame."

"Is he conscious?"

"Partially."

"What has he said?" demanded Frankfort.

The doctor's gaze wandered, flashed quickly to the questioner.

"Nothing," he answered.

"Does he know who did this deed?" and Frankfort pointed to the body on the floor.

"He does not know of it, sir."

"Would it not be well to tell him, and learn what he can explain?"

Gifford had seemed to resent questions from one who was a stranger to him, and he now replied, with some sharpness:

"He will not be told. I am a physician; I know best what to do."

"Pardon me! I did not mean to question that. I think you will admit, however, that his statement would be very important if he could give the light by which the assassin could be run down promptly."

"Your views are correct; your information is meagre. The shock has been such that Warren Addison now lies in a semi-unconscious state. There is a glimmer of reason in his mind, and he has twice answered me when I asked how he felt. To this inquiry he has dully replied, 'Better!' It was a mechanical response. To all intents and purposes he lies in a stupor."

There was an air of stubborn defiance about the explanation that Frisco Frank could not help noticing. Either Gifford was particularly unwilling to have another voice raised in the case of a patient, or he had other reasons for resenting what had been said.

"Will he get well, doctor?" asked the sheriff.

Again Gifford shook his head.

"I will not venture to predict. You know he has been sick. Now he has a double burden to struggle under. I am going to fight hard to save his life."

"Who is with him?"

"Agatha Beese. She proves to be a most capable nurse."

"Was he in the room of the explosion, with his brother, when found?" asked Frankfort.

"Yes."

Doctor Gifford suddenly bent his brows into a frown, and his eyes did not have a pleasant light as he looked at the questioner.

"May I ask what your deep interest in this case is?" he curtly responded.

"Most assuredly," was the answer.

"I am a detective."

"A—what?"

"A detective."

"What is your theory as to the tragedy, sir?"

Gifford was stirred out of his usual composure. He had asked for fight

and received it, but he who had given it was impressed with the belief that it was not especially good news. On the contrary, the physician appeared to be flustered.

"A detective!" echoed the sheriff.

"The dickens you are!"

"That is my calling."

"Who are you?" demanded Gifford.

"My name is John Frankfort."

"What! Frisco Frank?"

"I have been called so."

A deep, audible breath welled up from Gifford's chest. The revelation was not received as a commonplace affair. It was good news or bad to the doctor, but the detective was willing to wait until the future gave more light before deciding fully how Gifford was impressed.

"Are you sure you are not romancing?" demanded Dowe.

"Quite sure."

"Then you are the right man in the right place. 'The Veteran Detective' they call you—that's what is needed here. Gifford, we are in luck!"

"Decidedly so," returned the doctor, absently.

"I shall be glad to turn this case all over to you—"

"Not so fast, sheriff! I did not come to Glory Gulch to assume such hard work. I shall have to be consulted."

Frisco Frank made the reply quietly, but with more than trivial meaning at the bottom of it. He had explained himself because he believed it necessary, but he did not care to be too prominently installed at Glory Gulch. He waved his hand to the sheriff, and added:

"Keep your case, sir. I shall be at your service for purposes of consultation, if desired, and I cannot help being interested, but I am unwilling to employ my vacation with too hard labor."

Was it fancy, or did Dr. Gifford look relieved on hearing this decision? Frisco Frank had watched him keenly, but secretly. He thought his eyes did not deceive him, and he drew his own conclusions.

The physician next took up the thread of conversation.

"We are all glad to have you among us, Mr. Frankfort," he asserted, "and you will find us more than willing to co-operate with you. As to my theory in this case—have you ever heard of the Gold-Dusters?"

"The name is new to me."

"Glory Gulch has been cursed with gold thieves. Originally, I believe, there was a band of road-agents that worried good people here. That day is past, but the Gold-Dusters still exist."

"Hang them!" muttered the sheriff.

"Gold thieves, eh?" replied the detective.

"Yes. Practically, they are what I might call sneak road-agents. They are too cowardly to work in the open, so nobody is ever held up on the road, and the stage has never been molested by them. They are sneaks."

"Where do they operate?"

"Wherever they can find plunder. Their specialty is stealing the dust that honest men mine, but they now and then rob a lone pedestrian near town, or even sneak into a house and rob it. A bold road-agent, may be hunted and hated, but he always gets a measure of respect for his valor. The Gold-Dusters get none, for they are arrant cowards—sneak-thieves."

"Where do they live?"

"In the mountains."

"I suppose you have hunted for them?"

"Yes, but without success. We know nothing of them except that they rob as I have described. We call them the Gold-Dusters, and, supposing that they have a leader, we call him Chief Duster. You see we can only guess as to their identity and names."

"But you think the Gold-Dusters did this?"

"A mere theory on my part."

"They came to rob and remained to kill, eh?"

"Such is my guess. They may have been discovered, and, cornered, they would have to fight. See?"

"Yes."

"A spark from something may have ignited the powder accidentally, and caused the explosion."

"Your theory is clear-cut," answered Frisco Frank. "Until we know more, it will be well to keep it in mind."

"It would be just like the Gold-Dusters," added the sheriff.

"Now, gentlemen," continued Gifford, "I must go to my patient. Warren Addison is in desperate condition. I hope to bring him to his senses, and his story will place the blame where it belongs."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN WITH THE KNIFE.

A few more words Doctor Gifford said, and then he retired to his professional duties. The sheriff and his party were left to do as they pleased, but there was but little more to see to then. They moved around and considered the various points as they wished, and then all filed out of the house.

A crowd still lingered at the door, but Frisco Frank looked in vain for any of those who, in one way or another, had made themselves of interest to him.

Robert Rover, Little Alf, and all the others had disappeared.

Sheriff Dowe asked the detective to co-operate with him fully, but the invitation was not accepted. Frankfort pleaded that he had come to Glory Gulch on a "vacation," and that he did not want to bind himself to hard work.

Searchers were still moving around the camp and its extremities fitfully, and the smaller party joined in the search.

Frankfort wanted to be alone, and he accomplished his purpose after half an hour had passed. Slipping quietly away from Dowe, he took to the hills, and proceeded to think upon his adventures of the night.

Matters had not gone as he had planned at the camp. His projected war upon Warren Addison had come to a halt with the grave injury to the latter, and events had grown out of it that he could not account for off-hand.

About all he was sure of was that he did not believe one-half that had been advanced in the way of theory, and that there was ample room for detective work in connection with the case.

Frankfort sat down on a rock and meditated. He was on a ridge, with the camp lying below him. He could see its lights in full, and, both where the lights were and beyond their circle, the searchers who sought to find the slayer of the night.

Further away rose the higher peaks of the mountains, great spires that faded away into gloom in the deeper shadow of the main range. A mild breeze sifted along from the west, and the whole brought back Frankfort's early days in camp vividly.

Once he had been ordered away from Glory Gulch with a stain on his name—an unjust stain, but all the more bitter on that account. Now he was told that the man who had been responsible for his disgrace was lying in his home at the point of death, and with a mystery left behind him that was taking the time of all the campers.

"He may live or die," mused the detective, "but it is well that I came here, I think there will be work for me to do in any case. I will make no rash haste; there is yet much for me to look to here." case. I will make no rash haste; there is yet much for me to look to here."

Deep in thought was the man from Frisco, but he was one that never allowed himself to forget his situation wholly.

Suddenly his head moved slightly, with an upward jerk. His eyes opened wider; his ears were strained to catch some sound.

Hark! Did somebody move not many

paces from him? Was there a rustling among the rocks?

Frankfort did not turn his head, but he was all alert. He listened with glowing interest. One hand strayed to his belt, where rested a ready revolver; then it fell away. He had other plans.

The seconds wore on. The detective remained impassive. Not a thing told that he was conscious of what was transpiring around him. If there was anybody who had evil designs it would seem that the way and the means were fully open. Perhaps somebody was gloating over anticipated triumph.

Then came a change. Frisco Frank leaped to his feet, as if flung upward by a resistless force. He turned, too, as he moved—he faced toward the west.

Before him was an impressive picture. A man half-stood, half-crowded there, leaning eagerly forward, and one of his hands grasped a knife, which was raised for a blow.

Caught in the act, he was yet a dangerous factor, and Frisco Frank realized it fully. He acted accordingly.

Swiftly he sent out one of his hands. There was good aim in the blow—the arm of the foe was caught, and the knife went whirling away, falling on the rocks with a noisy rattle. Fast on the heels of the stroke came the sharp interrogation of the detective:

"Well, what do you want here?"

A deep breath welled up from the would-be assassin's throat that was like a gigantic sigh. Disappointment and rage was expressed in the exhalation.

Then the big body shot forward, and a pair of big hands was outstretched to seize the detective. It was a furious assault, but it was met with the customary coolness of the man from Frisco.

Frankfort stepped back, and, in place of success, the foe received a blow that landed full upon his face. He had a tough hide, and only uttered a snarl of anger, and pressed on. He received more blows, but he felt able to do something in that line, himself, and the affair resolved itself into a pugilistic encounter. He tried to get at Frankfort with all his might, but a storm of blows was rained upon his face, until he reeled and weakened under the punishment, and finally wound it up by falling to the earth.

Muttered snarls still escaped his lips, but he was bereft of sight and strength just then, and he could do no more. Frisco Frank whirled him over upon his back, and planted a foot upon his chest with no delicacy of touch.

"Bad Benson!" the detective exclaimed.

"Grurr-r-r!" grated the tough, in impotent wrath.

"You wanted to kill me. How do you like the results?"

Bad Benson groaned dismally.

"As a fighter you are not a success," sarcastically added the man from Frisco. "Did you think you could worst me? Did you ever whip anybody?"

"Oh! let me get up and git at ye!"

"Do you want the rest of your beauty destroyed?"

"You played a mean trick onter me. I was a-goin' along peaceable, an' you jest hopped at me like a mad bull. Wot have I done ter be hammered like this?"

"It was what you didn't do. If you had killed me you would have got off scot-free. Never make such a mess of your business again, or somebody will give you your own coin. Maybe I had better, even now. See!—I have a knife. I will raise it aloft—so! One blow—so!"

"Stop, stop!" howled Bad Benson, in terror. "Let me be; I won't do you no harm. I never wanted ter do any."

"Get up!"

Sharply Frisco Frank jerked his foe to his feet. The chance was open to do all the fighting that he wished, but, somehow, Bad Benson did not improve it. He was as malevolent as ever, but he noticed that the detective's hand rested upon his revolver. Bad Benson was not a coward when there was a fair

chance to fight with success, but he had no intention of throwing himself upon a loaded revolver. He stood inactive.

Frisco Frank looked at him in silence for several seconds; then he imperiously demanded:

"Who sent you to do this?"

"Who sent me?" mumbled Benson.

"That's what I said."

"Nobody sent me."

"Benson, why do you lie? I can read you like a book. You are not pleasant reading—a common man would recoil from the print that is stamped on your face and soul, but I am used to meeting with filth in my profession. Who sent you?"

"Nobody."

"Benson, you need another whipping!"

"No, blame ye, no! You've hammered my face all inter jelly now, an' I reckon I have concussion o' the brain."

"Rest easy on that point—you never had a brain to be injured!"

"Curse ye! can't ye use a man decent?"

"Do you feel that you haven't your just deserts?"

"Yes."

"Then make your will, and I'll try to finish the job I've begun."

"Hold on, cuss ye! Hold on. Don't hit me again; I'm a mass o' bruises now."

"Enough of folly, Benson. Who sent you?"

"I tell ye, nobody. Don't I know—"

"You are a fool as well as a knave, sir. This was not a chance attempt on your part. It was thought best that I should not live to watch another sun climb over the mountains. You were chosen as the means of my taking off. You followed me; you sneaked up behind like the coward you are; you drew your knife and gloated over your triumph. How do you like the result?"

Bad Benson shook his head stubbornly.

"Where is the man who hired you?" pursued Frankfort. "Is not my money as good as his? I will pay you to tell me who sent you. What do you say?"

"You're wrong, all wrong. Nobody hired me, an' I never meant ter do ye no harm. It was all chance that I happened ter be here by ye when you turned an' seen me—"

"That will do! I have no more words to waste upon you. Brute, bully, and liar, we must live in the same town for awhile. Let me whisper in your ears. If you meddle with me again—if you seek to do me harm—I will cut your ears off! Hear me? Absorb my words while you have those big ears left on your head. I am done. Go, Bad Benson, and lose no time about it. Get away from here!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A SUGGESTION FROM TOMMY.

Frisco Frank reached out and gave his late assailant a push. It almost took the bully off from his feet, and when he recovered his balance he turned upon the detective with fresh fury flaming in his eyes. He found himself looking at a leveled revolver.

"You had better go!" added Frankfort, calmly.

There was an ugly gurgle in Benson's throat, but he knew he was not in condition to proceed to hostilities. Frisco Frank's blows had fallen more heavily than even he thought, and the bully was, for once, weak and confused. It was no time to fight.

Sullenly he turned and walked away, and not once did he look back.

"I have made an enemy who will do his best to kill me, later on," muttered the detective. "What does it matter? He tried it to-night. I shall have to deal with him when he comes again, and a little fuel added to the fire will not hurt me. I wonder—I very much wonder—if I hit anywhere near the mark when I charged him with having come as the agent of others? It was a random shot—maybe it touched bedrock. We will see in the future."

Lingering no longer, Frisco Frank went on toward the hotel, but he had not reached it when he was accosted by a man who was a stranger to him. He did not remember having seen him before, but the man stopped him with an appearance of eagerness.

"Say, pardner, kin I have a word with yer?" he demanded.

"Two of them, if you wish. What is it?"

"You are the detective?"

"That is my line."

"Wot do yer think o' this affair at Addison's?"

"Being a stranger here I cannot have any opinion. I don't know the men. Do you know them?"

"All but the one who was killed."

"How do you study it out?"

"Pardner, it strikes me as mighty queer that Homer Addison was killed jest as he reached this here town."

"It surely is, unless some theory can be advanced in the case."

"I'm wonderin' ef it can have been planned."

"Why should it be planned? Who would naturally plan it?"

"Now you git me. I ain't no detective—"

"By the way, who are you?"

"Name, Tommy Wrenn—occupation, superintendent o' Peter West's mine here—Claim 47."

"Ah! yes, yes; I have heard of the mine. It doesn't pay richly."

"Pardner, some frosts fall at intervals, but the frost at Claim 47 never lets up. That hole in the ground is the worst I ever see—it is a gigantic grave, and the place where Peter West's money an' hopes lies buried—an' he with a fine darter—oh! say, it's melancholy! But we was speakin' o' the murder. Say, I don't like Doctor Pownall Gifford!"

"Why not?"

"Instinct, I reckon—instinct! Here he is a doctor, though how he gets a livin' in this camp I don't know; yet he has time ter trot off East an' bring Homer Addison here. It looks queer ter me!"

"Why was it necessary for Homer Addison to have an escort here? Was he not capable of coming alone?"

"Wal, yer see that Warren hadn't seen his brother fer a good many years. When he drew near his end, with a fatal disease onter him, he wanted ter settle up his affairs. He owned a mine here—Misery Mine, we call it—an' was worth a good pile o' money; an' he wanted ter know who his heir was. See?"

"Not fully. Didn't he know?"

"No. Ye see, he'd been so long away from the East, an' had never communicated with his relations, that he didn't know what relations he had. He didn't even know whether his brother was alive—hadn't heard from him fer a full fifteen year or so."

"What part did Doctor Gifford play?"

"He was sent by Warren ter investigate. He wanted him ter learn ef Homer was alive, an' ef he was, ter bring him here. Gifford did the errand and brought him, an' now yer see the situation."

Frankfort was silent. He was looking fixedly at Tommy Wrenn, but, really, he did not see Tommy at all. The new features of the case had impressed Frisco Frank even more than Wrenn expected.

The miner had relapsed into silence, and it was Frankfort who finally broke the pause.

"The brothers had not met in fifteen years?"

"No."

"Warren must have been about eighteen when they parted, and I believe somebody said Homer was even younger."

"Three years younger."

"Then they last saw each other as boys of fifteen and eighteen, respectively. The last fifteen years would make big changes. And all this while they did not hear from each other, say you?"

"Not a whisper. You see, Warren

was a wild feller in his youth, an' he run away from home. He never sent word back, nor knew ef any o' his kin lived or died, an' he didn't keer until he took sick an' his nerve weakened. Then, when he thought o' the money he must leave, he began ter think o' his brother, too."

"Did he write to him?"

"No. Jest sent Doc Gifford ter the old home ter look Homer up."

"Humph! Who saw the brothers meet here?"

"Nobody but Gifford, as far as I know."

"Then, it is not known whether they recognized each other?"

"Why, no; though the doctor could tell that."

"He would doubtless be willing."

Tommy Wrenn looked critically at the speaker. He thought there was something significant in Frisco Frank's reply. The detective's expression could not be well read in the dim light.

"Strange," added Tommy, "that Homer come all this way only ter die by an assassin's hand the hour he got hyer."

"It was strange."

"What d'yer make of it?"

"Again I say, I am a new-comer here. What is your theory?"

Wrenn thrust his bearded chin forward and then briskly rubbed the bristling forest thereon.

"I dunno," he confessee, slowly, "I dunno; but, pard, betwixt you an' me, I don't like Pownall Gifford. He may be all right, an' then, again, is he all right? He has been mighty active in Warren Addison's affairs, an' he's still keepin' of it up."

"If Homer is dead, who is Warren's heir?"

"I don't know."

"Would Gifford profit by it?"

"How could he? He ain't one o' the family, an' I ain't inter the secrets they have. What beats me, though, is that Homer come all this way, an' was killed right after he got here."

"Surely Warren would not have done it."

"Why should he?"

"If there was a league against Homer the blow would have fallen before they reached here, I should say."

"Yes. Looks perplexin', no matter which way you turn, don't it?"

"Wrenn, be frank. Have you any real reasons for looking upon the doctor with suspicion?"

"No. All I can say is, there has been a killin', an' I don't like Gifford a bit. Mebbe I'm prejudiced against him—he's too meddlesome about Claim 47 ter suit me."

"How does he meddle?"

"Oh! he's always advisin' old Peter West, an' he don't know no more about mines than Peter does. Say, it's tough fer an old miner ter superintend a claim where thar ain't no judgment used by anybody."

"So things are bad with West's mine?" inquired Frisco Frank, his voice changing.

"Mighty bad."

"Does West suffer for the necessities of life—he and his family?"

"He ain't got no family but his darter Dorothy. That's lucky fer him. Ef I had sech a darter I shouldn't want no more. She would be enough, an' all others would be dead weights. She's a good one—land o' love! ain't she a sweet one, though!"

"But they are poor—very poor?"

"Yes."

"Unfortunate Dorothy!—I mean, unfortunate West!"

"I feel most fer her; but he suffers in two ways. He never was cut out fer a miner. Ef you ever meet him, jest listen ter his talk. It will be all about cross-cuttin' so many feet o' mineralized gangue an' decomposed porphyry, an' about sulphuret an' phonolite, an' that sort o' rubbish. Whar he got all o' them technical terms I don't know. Will they bring up gold from pay-dirt?"

"Hardly."

"I'm a practical miner; but I'm uneducated. He's the last, an' he ain't practical. He keeps chewin' over his scientific terms an' dreamin'—oh! say, poor old Peter. I feel fer him!"

"And Dorothy!" deeply added Frankfort.

"Yes. Poor Dorothy!"

"Hang the mine, anyhow! It's no good. When I took hold I really thought I might strike something fer the old man. I hain't, an' now I would quit only I really pity the old chap—an' Dorothy!"

John Frankfort moved restlessly.

"Poor Dorothy!" he murmured.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECRET FOES.

Tommy Wrenn seemed pleased to find such ready sympathy, and he lingered with Frisco Frank for some time longer, but his story was told as far as he knew it then. The two men finally separated, and the detective walked back to his hotel.

The hour had grown late, but the miners were men who did not give much heed to sleep in hours of excitement like the present. Frankfort could have found plenty of company in the main room, but he was ready to go to bed, and he went without more delay.

Before falling asleep he meditated on the changed condition of affairs. He had come to Glory Gulch with the intention of having satisfaction from Warren Addison. Other events had come to the front, and it seemed as if he would have more than one drama to occupy his time.

There were mysteries at the camp, and, as all centered around the man who had practically driven him out of Glory Gulch, years before, all seemed well worth looking into.

He passed a restful night, and morning found him more than ever eager to take up the trail in full.

Inquiry of the clerk gave him no additional light. It was not known that any report had come from the Addison house, so the condition of the wounded man was unknown.

Frisco Frank ate a good breakfast at his leisure, and seemed to have no concern outside of the meal. Afterward he smoked a cigar, and would have followed this with a walk through the camp had he not been informed before he could start that he had a caller.

"It is Mayor Everell," was the additional information.

It occurred to Frisco Frank that he had probably been selected to take full charge of the murder case. This he did not intend to do, for he was not there to relapse wholly into a detective; but he had no objection to seeing the leading man of the town.

He went to the private room where Mr. Everell awaited him.

The official head of the camp was not an old man. He might have been forty, but he did not look so. He was a sleek, fat, amiable-looking man, but his greeting of the detective did not seem exactly in keeping with the way of amiability.

He waved his hand toward a chair and abruptly directed:

"Sit down, sir!"

Frisco Frank was quick to take a hint. The interview had not opened well, and he bowed and calmly replied:

"I am told that you wish to see me, sir."

"You are John Frankfort, eh?"

"Yes."

"Formerly of this town?"

"Yes."

"I called in regard to that. I was told that you once lived here, and—ah!—I was told something of your history."

"I did not know that I had a biographer here."

"It is rather awkward, Frankfort," replied Everell, without seeming to be impressed with the awkwardness; "but I must speak of facts. I understand that you had some trouble here."

"None at all, sir."

"Were you not ordered out of town?"

"Yes."

"Don't you call that trouble?"

"Not for me. It may have troubled those who worried so much over me then."

"You admit that you are that same John Frankfort?"

"Yes."

"Then let me ask you if the decree of banishment ever has been made void?"

"I don't know; I never asked."

"Yet, you are back here."

"Back in the flesh, as you see. I always liked Glory Gulch, and I may conclude to take up my permanent headquarters here."

"But you were banished."

"That's a common thing in the West."

"Is it equally common for banished men to return to the place whence they were driven out?" sharply demanded Everell.

"I can't say as to that."

"I think it is not."

"Mr. Mayor, oblige me by coming to the point. We are men of adult years, and there is no reason why we should beat around the bush. What do you want?"

"To be frank, my attention has been called to the fact that you are under decree of banishment."

"By whom?"

"I have promised not to give names."

"My accusers are very modest, it seems."

"Publicity is not always to be desired, you know."

"Well, what next?"

"Oh! as I asked you before, has the decree of banishment ever been annulled?"

"As I told you before, I don't know anything about it. The matter never has interested me in the least."

"Do you mean that you are indifferent to it?"

"That's about the size of it."

"Really, this is remarkable language. This is a law-abiding town."

"So I noticed last night."

The retort took the mayor down for a moment, and he hesitated before saying anything more. Presently he summoned his courage and went on with his usual blandness.

"You ought to look at this in a reasonable light, sir. I am mayor of Glory Gulch, and I have a duty to perform to my constituents. Unless I do that duty I shall feel that I am a negligent official. If you will take this view of the matter we can get along much better."

"Let us assume that I do take it. What then?"

"I wanted to know if the decree of banishment was still in force?"

"It is not likely it ever has been wiped off the books."

"Then the situation becomes peculiar."

"Be plain, Mr. Everell. Are you here to order me out again?"

"Bless me, that is something that never has been done in my incumbency. It is unpleasant to order people out, and we contrive to get along without it. I am sorry that this matter has come up, but you see how it is."

"Are you afraid I shall contaminate the morals of your people?"

"I have seen no sign of that, but this decree of banishment—Ah, ah!"

"Who is worried over it? Who brought it to your mind? Why does it so affect you? You are a man of considerable breadth of body, if not of mind. Fat men are not usually overburdened with scruples, I think. Don't you think you can stagger along under the weight of my presence awhile longer?"

"Well, sir, duty—duty—You know!"

"I will make a suggestion, Mr. Mayor. Go to those immaculate persons who complain of my presence here, and ask them to come to me. I deal with no man at a distance. If they want to complain of me, let them drop in and see me. Until then I have nothing more to say."

Everell changed expression noticeably. For some reason he did not like this rebuff, and he could not hide the fact. He swallowed twice, though there was nothing foreign in his mouth, and then abruptly arose. Stiffly he replied:

"I will make my report."

"Do so, and advise the complainants to come out of ambush. Tell them it is cowardly to fight in the woods, and manly to appear in the open. Until they come out thus, I shall set them down as men who have shady records themselves."

"How's that?"

"An innocent man seeks no cover."

"Oh! pooh, pooh! There is nothing wrong in this."

"Just say so to the complainants, and it will end their frantic ebullition. Tell them, too, that they can't scare me out of Glory Gulch. As long as I have you with me, I feel that I am safe to defy them. Show them the sympathy you feel me—why, Mr. Mayor, we will yet have a hearty laugh over this."

Everell seemed bewildered for a moment, for he had not expressed any sympathy, but he managed to find his voice again.

"I hope they will make no trouble."

"So do I, for they will find that two can play at that game."

The mayor had reached the door, and Frisco Frank now smiled his widest smile, and opened the door suggestively.

"Tell them to let me alone or get hurt!" he added, with a laugh.

Irvin Everell managed to say good-day somehow; then he walked down the stairs, but Frankfort noticed that his steps were slow and undecided. The detective did not take the trouble to watch him far, but reclosed the door and returned to his own room.

"Plain as day!" he exclaimed. "There is a movement to scare me out of Glory Gulch, and this knave of a mayor is in it. Scare me out? Well, when they do I will go willingly. When my legs run my mind has no further use of Glory Gulch."

If Frankfort saw clearly on some points, he was perplexed on others. He had not expected to find the mayor of the town leagued against him, and it was suggestive of the strength of the opposition he must expect to encounter.

"I am not wanted here," he muttered, "and that means that I must go or fight. I will fight!"

CHAPTER X.

A CASE OF BLUE GLASS.

Shortly after Frisco Frank left his room and repaired to the public room of the hotel. It was getting about time to renew his grasp on the passing events, and there was a possibility that something new might have come from the wounded man of the West Slope.

There was little doing in the public room. The clerk was sitting in idleness, and the barkeeper had but little more to occupy his time. Frisco Frank purchased a cigar, sat down, and proceeded to listen to the others.

There was plenty to hear, and nearly everything was concerning the tragedy of the night before.

"It's a great pity!" declared the clerk. "I saw Homer Addison when he came in on the stage, and I must say he was as like Warren, his brother, as two peas. Same form, same color of hair and mustache, and same sort of face."

"I reckon the Gold-Dusters did it," remarked a miner.

"Sure!" agreed a comrade.

"Maybe he fell on his own knife when the explosion came."

"Then where is the knife now?"

"Maybe the explosion blew the knife right at him."

"Yes, or a piece of glass from the window may have hit him."

Frisco Frank was not getting gems of wisdom from these philosophers, but he kept his place and waited for news. He was still waiting when a man pushed

back the front door and entered the hotel.

Some men are born to notoriety, and some achieve it. The new-comer's birthright could not be told easily, but he had elements of appearance that took him out of the ranks of the commonplace part of humanity. What first impressed Frisco Frank was a singular glitter which preceded the man, but it took a closer survey to discover what it was.

The stranger was not a miner, and he wore a regulation sack coat. From all parts of this garment dangled spectacles of blue glass. Attached to strings, they were fastened to him from neck to waist, and so thick that he might well have been thought a man of glass, himself.

He advanced briskly, after one investigating glance, and was soon a member of the party. Frisco Frank was nearest to his path, and he paused before the detective.

"Here you are!" he exclaimed, cheerfully. "Glasses for the eyes—old-fashioned and new—spectacles, nose-pinchers, English dear-boy single glasses—all the paraphernalia of the trade, and of the finest stock. Choicest art output of London, Berlin, Paris, New York, and Walla Walla. Glasses, glasses, glasses!"

Somehow he loosened several of his ornaments, and then, under his dextrous manipulation, they began to swing about in circles, the strings hanging close to their owner, but the glasses, themselves, traveling their orbits with surprising accuracy.

It was skillful jugglery, for his only motion was of the fingers, but the glasses swung before his face and body with such system as never to become entangled.

Suddenly he seized all at once, and stopped their antics.

"Glasses for sale!" he added, with emphasis on the final word. "Nothing to give away, and nothing to loan. Glasses for sale! Gentlemen, observe them closely. You will see that all are of blue glass. That is because they are a highly superior article, and because the subscriber knows his business. Blue glass is good for man, woman, child, and Chinamen. Blue glass does away with lumbago, malaria, lung fever, and all ills that flesh is heir to here below. Buy, that's your part! Cure, that's the part of the spectacles. Pocket the cash, that's my part. Who leads off?—who wants an eye-glass that will do for mine, parlor, or home consumption? Glasses for sale!"

Once more his hands moved restlessly, and the glasses seemed to become endowed with life. They started out in circles, and soon the whole collection was engaged in the strange gyrations before noted.

This time the exhibition was shorter. The stranger stopped his show, took a forward step, and added:

"The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk—but especially the dim-eyed get their vision back. Have one, partner?"

The last question was of Frisco Frank, before whom he had stopped, and the detective did not keep him in suspense.

"I know of no earthly reason why I should buy glasses, blue, red, or otherwise, except that a skillful juggler deserves his reward. My eyes are good—happily, my pocket-book is not totally empty. Give me one of your collection."

"You will never regret it, sir. Of all the States I have been in California has the most people in need of blue glasses, and no other class is so quickly cured of its ills. Thank you, sir! You pay me a gentleman. Put on your glasses."

"Thank you—later."

"What do you suffer from mostly?"

"Pain."

"Where?"

"Nowhere, just now. Believe me, sir, I am quite well. If I become otherwise I shall use your glasses with due faith."

"They will repay that faith. Try

them well. Let the burning rays of the tropical sun or the strange light of the polar regions strike your eyes—the glasses will ward off all trouble, and your sight will be wonderfully good."

"I can but poorly express my gratitude," replied Frisco Frank, willing to humor the quaint vendor. "It is good for this camp that such a wise man has come among us."

"Right! I am wise. Not on books—I can't read much, and that little I ain't certain of, but I am wise in glasses. Use that pair daily, sir, and the remarkable efficacy of blue glass will make itself known. New life will shoot through your veins in a way that will surprise you. Who buys next? Glasses to sell!"

Again he agitated his collection, and once more the glasses went spinning around in circles.

The detective took an interest in the jugglery, but the man was less important in his estimation. There was little about him to call for notice—he was a commonplace person in all ways to look at. It was true that his well-worn clothes bespoke acquaintance with a degree of hard luck that the blue glass had not warded off, but his bristling hair and whiskers were abundant—he was not poor in all ways.

His luck in selling to others in the room was good, but not because anybody felt the need of glasses. He was patronized as unique persons are liable to be at all times.

When he was through he allowed his glasses to settle down on his coat, and took a drink at the bar. This done, he joined Frisco Frank.

"Live here?" he asked.

"Just now I am here."

"So am I, but I make my home where I can sell blue glass happiness to a suffering people. I am on my way to Oregon. There are men and women there who are suffering from the ills that the eye is heir to, and I go to succor them. Not long shall I tarry in your beautiful town of the mountains."

"Did you come on the stage?"

"No. Legs did it—legs! I have most remarkable legs. They wasn't mates originally. One was seven inches longer than the other, but I used blue glass, and you see the result. I am willing to exhibit them in any dime museum now at so much a head."

"You seem to have several ways of making money."

"I find things out that others don't know. Which reminds me—kin you read?"

"I could yesterday."

"It may be so this morning. I found something outside the town, blowing here and there by the wayward wind, and I'll ask you to read it. I know not the subject of the document. Oblige me!"

He had taken a roll of paper from his pocket, and he now spread it out before the detective.

"Focus your lamps on this," he added.

Frisco Frank had felt no interest in the request, but one glance at the paper was enough to dispel his indifference. Across its top was written in a bold hand this line:

"Last Will and Testament of Warren Addison!"

The detective started. Surely, there was reason why he should feel interested in such a document.

"This paper—where did you get it?" he demanded.

"Found it among the rocks outside of the town."

"When?"

"This morn, at early dawn."

"A lost paper, do you say?"

"Well, the winds were making free with it, and it was wandering here and there as each wayward ripple of breeze seized upon it."

"Blowing about in a hap-hazard way! That's strange. Wait! I will read it through."

There was not much to read. The will

had been boiled down well, and Frisco Frank mastered the clear chirography without difficulty. He was one whose profession called upon him to guard his expression, but professional skill did not seem to avail him anything then. Amazement was plainly depicted on his face as he read, and the cool, steady detective was lost in the mere man.

He had expected mysteries and developments at Glory Gulch, but he would have been mad, indeed, to have expected the revelation of the words of that will.

CHAPTER XI.

A REMARKABLE BEQUEST.

The document so strangely acquired read as follows:

"I, Warren Parthemore Addison, of the town of Glory Gulch, California, being of sound mind, but feeble bodily health, ordain and declare this to be my last will and testament, disavowing and annulling all former wills made, or purporting to have been made by me, and declaring this to be my sole and only true will. Touching my worldly goods I hereby make disposal of them as follows:

"Imprimis, I direct that all my just debts be paid by my executors, and my estate settled as soon as can be done without detriment to the estate.

"Secondly, I give and bequeath to John Frankfort, of San Francisco, all my interest and claim in the mine which I now own, said mine being commonly called 'Misery Mine,' and lying adjacent to Claim 9 in this town of Glory Gulch; and to the said John Frankfort I also give all and sundry the appurtenances and things pertaining to said mine, including all present improvements, all machinery in use therein, and, in brief, the very land itself, and all that said land has within the mine or upon the surface thereof.

"Thirdly, I give to my brother, Homer Addison, if he be living, all sums of money I may have in bank, or in ready cash; also, all bonds, stocks, and debts to me owed. And, if he, my said brother, be not living, then I direct that this bequest to him be set aside as a fund, the interest of which shall be applied to the poor of the town of Glory Gulch, from the time of the settlement of my estate to time without end."

Then followed the signature, properly backed up, as it were, by those of two other men as witnesses.

Bewildered, Frisco Frank looked up and met the gaze of the seller of blue glass. The latter was grinning broadly.

"Do you like it?" he asked.

"Man, what in the world is this?"

"You said you could read."

"And you said you could not, but I don't believe it now. Confess that you know every line of this!"

"I confess!"

"Confess that it is a fraud!"

"Slowly, slowly, my friend! Do you know me?"

"No."

"My name is Barachias Bee, peddler of glasses that cure, soothe, and renew the mortal man. Can such a man lie? I reply, he can! Yet, I have told you no lie except that I led you to believe that I could not read."

"You found this paper outside the town—"

"Blown hither and yon by wayward breezes—"

"Without any other person being near it—"

"Like a sheep lost from the fold. Correct!"

"What did you do?"

"Picked it up and read it promptly. Then I came here—I had just ridden in by the Stone-Bruise Trail—and, keeping the paper out of sight of everybody, I made due inquiries. I asked for Warren Parthemore Addison. It was said that he was dying. Next I asked for you, and I was directed here. I knew who you were when I entered this room, because I had you pointed out to me, and I came to place this in your hands,

as I deemed it yours by right—if Addison could not receive it. I am a business man, and I paused to sell my wares before introducing another subject. That's the truth, briefly told."

Frisco Frank looked into Barachias Bee's face, and decided that he was telling the truth. It was an honest face, and Barachias looked candid now.

"Have you seen the date of this document?" continued Frankfort.

"Yes."

"July fifteenth: That was only yesterday."

"Correct."

"Addison wills all the mine to me—to me!"

"Does it surprise you?"

"More, it astounds me."

"Then the matter becomes of interest."

"It becomes the greatest puzzle of the age. He—Warren Addison—wills his mine to me—to me!" repeated Frisco Frank, with singular persistence, it seemed to Bee.

"Fact!"

"Yet, he and I were enemies."

"Aha! that does make it queer. Enemies, eh? Why?"

The detective was silent. In his surprise he had lost his caution and spoken freely. He was sorry for it then. Barachias watched him for a moment, and then laughed lightly.

"Never mind me," he directed. "I have no notion of prying into your affairs. Keep your secrets, only remember this—I am at your service if you want a helping hand. Trust me to fight for you, if need be, and don't think you must go further out of your way. I'm no pryer into other men's affairs."

"It seems most strange to me," added Frisco Frank, "that a will should be drawn one day and found drifting around among the rocks the next morning."

"Facts tell! You see I own a mule. I ride this mule. The mule walks, kicks, humps himself—but rarely trots. This morning I was riding in along the Stone-Bruise Trail. Night had overtaken me in the hills, and I had camped there, only to be up and moving early. Riding along on Horatius, my mule, I found this paper."

"To whom have you shown it?"

"To you."

"Nobody else?"

"Nobody but Horatius. He is an intelligent mule; I showed it to him. He read it, but he won't tell."

"I wish to keep this matter quiet."

"I'll do it. Let's chloroform it."

"Mention it to nobody."

"Not a soul."

"I may be able to make this a financial success to you; I surely will do what I can. But—it amazes me!"

Frisco Frank spoke truly. The paper had all of the marks of genuineness. It was drawn up in a rough way, bespeaking haste, perhaps, and the phraseology was that of a person with a smattering of legal knowledge, only. No lawyer had drawn the will. Yet, it seemed to have been done with a serious purpose.

Addison and Frisco Frank had been enemies for years. Now—was it possible that the Misery Mine was willed to the detective?

"This is a trick!" Frankfort exclaimed.

"Done by whom?"

"I don't know. It can't be genuine—"

"You have the names of the witnesses," reminded Barachias.

They were there, and they added to the mystery of the case. The names were those of Irvin Everell and Oliver Gee. Both names had already been mentioned in Frisco Frank's hearing, and he was not likely to forget Mayor Everell.

It was to be hoped that Mr. Gee was made of different material, for he might become an important factor in the case.

Frankfort and Bee had been holding their interview at one side, and, while thus occupied, other men had dropped

in, until the room was much better filled. Barachias had been handling his spectacles nervously, evincing a desire to get to work professionally, but, just then, there was an arrival that was important in the detective's estimation.

Doctor Pownall Gifford entered.

The latter gave no heed, it seemed, to the identity of those already present, but walked at once to the bar.

"Whisky, straight!" was his terse order.

"How is Warren Addison?" asked the barkeeper, quickly.

There was no reply until the order had been filled and disposed of fully. Then Gifford answered:

"Addison is in a bad way."

"Sinking?"

"Well, no, but he does not recover from the shock. It was terrible—terrible to one in his weakened condition, and it has brought painful results. He is blind!"

"Blind?"

"His sight is totally gone."

"Thunder! that's bad luck!"

"Our old friend is in a bad way, surely."

"Is he permanently blind?"

"I am not sure of that. I cannot examine as fully as I shall do later, if he rallies a bit. Just now he lies with his eyes bandaged wholly, and well he may—the light of day is as nothing to him."

"Then he is not much better off than his brother."

"We may yet bring back his sight; the question is whether the vision has been destroyed, or whether the shock suspended the powers of sight temporarily. I am doing all I can for him."

"Does he see visitors now?"

"Impossible!" replied Gifford, with what seemed to Frisco Frank to be needless haste. "It will be many days before he can see anybody. Our worldly curiosity must be made secondary to common decency. He has done only one thing of importance."

"What is that?"

"This morning," replied Gifford, deliberately, "he made his will!"

CHAPTER XII.

WORDS, HOT AND HOSTILE.

Frisco Frank heard the declaration with renewed interest. It came at a suggestive time, and with it came a flood of suspicions against Pownall Gifford that had been only vague and half-hearted before. Impulsively the detective rose—then he paused and stood awaiting the next words.

"Made his will, eh?" replied a miner.

"Then he must be near his end, or else he thinks so."

"Being sightless," added the doctor, "he had to resort to the making of his mark, instead of writing his name."

"Who gets his money? Who gets the Misery Mine?"

"I don't know. I was not present."

"Who was?"

"Amos Conness and Albert Snow were the witnesses."

"Didn't they tell who he willed ter?"

"If they have told, they didn't tell me. I have no idea. Homer Addison told me that he and Warren were the last of their family—consequently, Warren had no relative to will anything to, you see."

Frisco Frank was not sure that he, for one, did "see." He was impressed with the belief that Pownall Gifford had come there to tell of the will, but not as a gossiping man would tell of it. If the detective's theory was correct, the plotters were preparing the way for the end. They wanted to impress the fact of the will fully on the public mind.

Frankfort touched the paper that nestled in his pocket. It was a safe bet that the new will did not leave Misery Mine to him.

"It is quite likely," pursued the doctor, meditatively handling his empty glass, "that the estate will go to some college, school, or, possibly, to charity."

We have Homer's word that there are no relatives."

Why did the speaker so dwell on the lack of relatives? The question came to Frisco Frank and he thought he could answer it fully. Public opinion was being formed so that the future would coincide with public expectation.

Quietly the detective moved closer to Gifford. There was a slight start on the latter's part, though Frankfort could not tell positively whether his presence there had been previously known.

"Allow me to ask," evenly spoke Frisco Frank, "what Mr. Addison says of the murder."

Gifford frowned.

"I do not permit him to be interrogated on that question. He is too weak of body and mind."

"Weak of mind!" slowly repeated the detective. "Then he is hardly capable of making a will legally."

The change that came over the doctor's face was a striking sight. With almost lightning rapidity consternation, chagrin, anger, and confusion flashed over his face, and his usually ready tongue was mute.

Frankfort did not need to study on the explanation. Gifford knew he had made a serious mistake, and he was startled by his own indiscretion.

He hastened to rally, and response was skillful when it came.

"I referred only to strength, quickness, and lightness of mind. His mind is perfectly clear and comprehensive, but he is so weak that vivacity is out of the question."

"Naturally. Well, as to his bodily condition. If he is strong enough to make his will, why cannot he tell something to aid in discovering the murderer of his brother?"

"The doctor's hands moved in erratic motions, as if he was seeking to grasp something. Probably he was, mentally."

"Your reasoning," he answered, after a pause, "is that of one who knows nothing of what he is talking about. Of course, in a general way, we have questioned him. Mayor Everell and myself did that. The answer was that the two brothers were standing in conversation when the explosion occurred. Warren lost consciousness, and when he came to he was in bed. He knows absolutely nothing of who killed his brother."

"Nobody was around?"

"No."

"Singular that Warren knows so little."

"Not at all, sir. The murder was done after the explosion—after he lost consciousness."

"In one particular you err. The murder was done before the explosion!"

"It was!" almost shouted Gifford. "Pray, how do you know?"

"The wound shows that. You will plainly see that the flying powder would have an entirely different effect on a fresh wound from what it would on an unbroken surface. The victim of the murder was dead when the explosion occurred!"

The full-colored face of the physician paled perceptibly. His eyes took on a new glitter, and Frisco Frank would not have been surprised had the angry man leaped upon him with hostile intent. But Gifford clinched his hands and controlled himself in a measure.

"If I were a vain man," he replied, his voice low and husky, "I should resent this. I am not vain, but I ask you—who should know best in this point, I, a doctor, or you, a mere novice in medicine?"

"How many murder cases did you ever investigate, doctor?" quietly asked Frankfort.

"None! I am talking of medicine. What has detective work to do with wounds on a human body? That is the province of medicine."

"Very true, yet no man can deal with murder cases, year after year, without learning something of the results of

certain things like the one now under consideration. The point is immaterial—we need not discuss it. It is but a passing event."

Outwardly, there was much of meekness in Frisco Frank's manner. He might have shown the doctor that he, too, knew something of medicine, but he rather regretted that he had already said so much. It was not his case, professionally, however, and he had an excuse for speaking which would not have existed if he had been allotted the work of hunting down the slayer.

Gifford seemed to grasp willingly at the new point.

"Right!" he agreed. "It is a trivial matter."

"No doubt Sheriff Dowe will learn all soon."

"Dowe is the man for the work."

"He impressed me as capable."

"I am willing to leave it to him."

"Quite right."

Just then somebody else pushed forward.

"Why do you keep the wounded man a prisoner?"

It was a sharp question at the doctor's elbow, and he wheeled with a nervous start. Little Alf stood there, pale, agitated, and with a look on his face as if he had not rested any of late.

"What's that?" demanded Gifford.

"Why do you keep him a prisoner?"

"Nobody is kept prisoner!" roughly declared the doctor.

"I went to the house this morning, and was refused admittance," explained the youth from Buzz-Saw.

"Well, did you expect to get in?"

"I wanted to see Addison."

"Who in thunder are you, anyhow?"

"My name is Alfred Parks."

"Do you know Addison?"

"No, but I wanted to see him on business—important business. More, I must, I will see him!"

Little Alf's voice rose to a high pitch, and his small fist was raised as if he would deliver a blow to whoever opposed his wishes.

A look of contempt came to Gifford's face. He had been alarmed, it seemed, when Frisco Frank was in the conversation, but this slight youth from Buzz-Saw was a very different person.

"When you get sight of him, just let me know!" sneered the doctor. "He is my patient. I am a physician, and I have the say in his case."

"Do you refuse to let me see him?"

"I do."

"What is your fear?—your secret?" cried Little Alf, sharply.

"Fear?—secret?"

"That's what I said."

"Boy, be careful! I could crush you with one hand, but I forbear. Still, you must use prudence—"

"Threats will not frighten or beat me off. I am not to be scared off, sir. I know there is a terrible mystery connected with this case—I know that the house of the West Slope holds secrets that the light of day dares not shine upon. What are they? You do not dare to tell. Guilt never dares—it crouches in the dark—it feeds on its human victims—it skulks, plots, strikes, kills!"

Shrilly rose the voice of the slight youth, and everybody in the room was listening raptly. Little Alf was highly keyed up, and his nervous, excited manner was putting everybody else into about the same condition.

Almost frantic rage and dismay showed in Gifford's manner, but he made a great effort, and after a moment answered scornfully:

"Mad, mad! Crazy as the worst lunatic in California! Why do I talk with you? I will not talk. Get away, or you will repent it. Get away, I say!"

"Not until I expose you fully! Not until I learn what crime you seek to do in that house—"

Gifford again wheeled upon the youth. "Silence!" he shouted. "Be still, or I will crush you like a snake!"

CHAPTER XIII.

ROBERT ROVER TAKES A HAND.

Doctor Gifford's hand had fallen to his pocket, and there could be no doubt that it touched a revolver, but even in this moment of nervous suspense there was a light touch on his shoulder.

"There will be no crushing of weak boys here!" spoke a calm voice.

Robert Rover, the sport, stood there with a face and manner wholly calm and unmoved. Mysteries, secrets, threats, and the nervous agitation of others fell upon him like a passing shadow on a rock. He saw, but he was as cool as ever.

"Men," he added, "do not make war on boys. If you raise a hand to injure Little Alf I shall shoot you in your tracks!"

It was direct talk, and plainly to be understood. No analysis was needed as an accompaniment.

Aggressive as the interruption was, it did much to cool Pownall Gifford. He fixed his regard fully upon the sport, and there was no quailing of manner with him.

"You will shoot me?" he repeated, deeply.

"Under certain conditions."

"Glory Gulch is not the place for such talk, sir."

"The place is wherever a man seeks to bully his physical inferior. Just now, the place is here."

"Do you know me?"

"You need not flash social position or professional rank at me. I know you. What of it?"

"I shall have you arrested for threatening me."

"It would be a novelty in a mining camp. Quite the usual thing, eh? Shall I be admitted to bail under bonds to keep the peace? When I am arrested there will be two of us in the pen. I have not threatened a boy."

Gifford hesitated, and then wiped his forehead nervously.

"I shall not quarrel with one so much my social inferior," he replied, "but—are you in charge of this boy?"

"If I am, what then?"

"Take him to a mad-house!"

"I think he can manage his own affairs. As to defense, I shall see that he comes to no harm."

"Take care of your lunatic. Boys, what will you have?"

The doctor turned away from Robert Rover with a scornful air, and then his invitation rung out loudly. He knew his audience. The way to keep in the good graces of the men of Glory Gulch was to cater to their appetites, and they were more often thirsty than hungry.

All but Frisco Frank, Rover, and Little Alf went to the bar. Barachias Bee was among the quickest of foot, just then, and he proved to have an able-bodied thirst.

The sport spoke to Little Alf, who drew back, and, when the crowd had given due heed to the drinkables, there was nobody to worry Pownall Gifford further. On his part, he talked lightly with the ordinary citizens of the town, plainly seeking to offset anything that had occurred prejudicial to his standing with them, and then, when he had kept this up long enough, he walked out of the room without another perceptible glance at those who had lately angered him so much.

Robert Rover seemed to have a marked influence over Little Alf. He had quieted the boy, and there was no one to object to Gifford's departure.

The men of Glory Gulch had seen too many exciting scenes to be long impressed by a quarrel, and the detective noted that the loungers seemed almost to have forgotten that the strangers were there. This being the case, he walked over and joined them.

Little Alf was plainly making an effort to be calm, but it was to the sport that Frisco Frank addressed himself.

"You have just had the satisfaction of quelling a bully," he remarked, evenly. "I thought a few words to the drug-mixer would not come amiss," responded Robert Rover, in the same way.

"You may hear from him again."

"My post-office is here, just now."

"He is of some power in town."

"So am I. His power is of the sort that skulks in ambush. Mine walks abroad in day, and it carries a revolver under its wing. I am not a brawler, but I think I might convince Doctor Gifford that it is just as well to let me alone."

"Don't fail to defend your friend."

Frisco Frank motioned to Little Alf, whereupon Robert Rover replied with some haste:

"Let there be no mistake on this point. I never saw this youth in my life until last night. I have tried to offer him the ordinary civilities that one decent person may offer another in need. Little Alf has not the years and muscle that some of us at Glory Gulch have. I never yet turned a deaf ear to the need of a worthy human being, and I trust I do not grow less considerate as I grow older."

"Your sentiments do you honor," replied Frisco Frank. "Little Alf, allow me to ask you a question—"

"Ask me nothing!" exclaimed the slight youth.

"Boy, look at me! Do I seem unfeeling? Am I weak of body? Consider these points, and then submit the question to yourself—is not my sympathy and help worth having?"

"Emphatically, yes!" declared Robert Rover. "Tell him so, Little Alf!"

"You are right," admitted the youth.

"We can, I think, be of help to each other, if we try," continued the detective. "The main thing is to understand the situation at Warren Addison's house. You hint at things there that do not appear on the surface—at mystery, secrets, crime! What do you know? Confide in me—"

"No, no!" exclaimed Little Alf, excitedly. "I can't do that."

"Do you know that I am a detective?"

"Yes."

"Then give me light, and I may be able to clear up all the mysteries that harrow your nerves, and right the cause of innocence. If you will tell me—"

"I can't, I can't!"

"You leave me in the dark."

"All is dark here!—dark, dark!"

Little Alf bowed his head upon his hands, and a deep sigh welled up from his chest. Frisco Frank looked at Robert Rover, but the latter drew forth a cigar and lighted it with as much composure as if nothing was transpiring out of the ordinary course of events.

The detective realized that, whatever the singular pair might know, he was not going to get at their secrets by asking. Being wise, he allowed the subject to rest.

It was not long after this that Sheriff Dowe entered the room. It was not a peculiarity of the sheriff's nature to be secretive, and he proceeded to answer all questions freely.

He admitted that he had learned nothing of the murder, and had no clew whatever.

"Maybe, though," he added, "something will come out when Warren Addison gets so he can talk."

"Maybe he will die, first," suggested the barkeeper.

"Shouldn't wonder at all. He's in a bad way. I met Mayor Everell just now, and I urged him to let me see Warren. He wouldn't do it. Then I asked him to question the wounded man, and he said it couldn't be done now. He is as anxious as anybody, but he says it won't do. They have not let Warren know what has happened, and not a question has been asked him. It won't do."

Frisco Frank had been listening with interest. The interest was suddenly redoubled. Doctor Gifford had said that he and Everell had that morning ques-

tioned Warren together, and that the patient had declared that he knew nothing of the murder, but that, at the time of the explosion, he and Homer had been standing in conversation.

Gifford's statement and that of Mayor Everell directly contradicted each other.

For the time being, at least, this fact escaped the notice of the ordinary loungers, but Little Alf raised his head with a start. It was next to certain that he did not miss the contradiction.

The sheriff was not disposed to lose much time, and he soon left the room. Little Alf expressed weariness, and went to his own room. Frisco Frank was left with the sport.

"Mr. Rover," he spoke, presently, "what do you know about this affair?"

"Nothing."

"You are active for a man wholly outside the gates."

"I am an idle man. I have nothing to occupy my time in Glory Gulch. I have become interested in Little Alf. He is a boy; he is among desperate men; he may need help. I am ready to help him. That is the story of my connection with the affair."

"Do you know his secret?"

"No."

"He is no miner."

"Think so?"

"It is sure. He has none of the attributes of miners. I think he knows little or nothing of life in the mountains. He wears the dress of the region, but it is out of place on him. He has drifted in as so many men do, with a secret on his mind. For his sake, I wish I knew what it is."

"It is not one of guilt."

"I can well believe that. I think well of Little Alf, but, further than that, my sight is clouded. Rover, you are made of good stuff. Do you keep your eyes open! Watch over the youth, and—if you can shed light on other events here, at any time, do it. Come to me."

"I will. Just now I am as ignorant as one of my sort usually is. I may learn more. If I do—consider me your ally."

"It's a bargain."

There was more talk, but Rover persisted that he knew of nothing to tell, and, presently, Frisco Frank rose and left the place. He had a clear purpose in view. In his pocket rested the will of Warren Addison, or what purported to be his will. If another had been made the paper possessed by Frisco Frank was not worth a penny, but he was interested in it, nevertheless.

The witnesses had been Mayor Everell and Oliver Gee. One of the two was Frankfort's enemy, unless he erred greatly. The other might not be, and he was resolved to see him without delay.

Learning where he lived, the detective took his way there, and was soon in his presence. Mr. Gee proved to be a man of good appearance, with an honest face and friendly manners.

He very willingly entered into conversation with his caller, but Frisco Frank was prudent, and only after a long talk about the murder and attendant circumstances did he approach the subject nearest his mind. Finally, everything was favorable, and he broached the subject.

"If Warren Addison dies, what will become of his property?"

Gee was silent. His gaze was fully upon Frisco Frank, and it was one of deep, though unspoken, inquiry. Frisco Frank waited impatiently.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STRANGE STEP DESCRIBED.

"There is a rumor," finally responded Gee, "that Warren Addison has made a will to-day."

"Only a rumor?" questioned Frisco Frank.

"As far as I am concerned it is no more. I have heard it said, but I cannot say how true it is."

"Do you think his mental condition is such as to fit him for work so arduous?"

"Rumor is uncertain on that point. I get conflicting accounts, so I don't know what to believe. Do you know Warren Addison?" added Mr. Gee, suddenly.

"I did, many years ago. Why?"

"Was he an intimate friend of yours?"

"No."

"Did you expect to be an heir?"

"Was I one?"

Gee allowed his gaze to fall. He meditated deeply for some time, and then looked up suddenly.

"I think," he pursued, "that I see my duty plain in this case. You were an heir!"

"Under the terms of Warren Addison's will?"

"Yes."

"You witnessed the will, did you?"

"Yes."

"How was I mentioned?"

"Addison's mine was left to you outright, with all its appurtenances, root and branch, as I may say."

"Why did he leave this mine?"

"He did not say. The will was not explained."

"Be so good as to describe what took place."

"Briefly, I was called in as a witness, the other witness being Mayor Everell. Warren Addison had written the will himself, and the ink was barely dry when we arrived. It was not long, and, I think, had been written hastily."

"When was this?"

"Not long before dark, last night! Addison hurried us, because he wanted to go to the hotel and meet his brother, who was expected, but, before he could do so, he was taken with a bad spell, and was not able to go."

Frisco Frank had a sudden thought.

"Were you there when he was taken so suddenly ill?"

"No, sir."

"Was any one there?"

"Mayor Everell was present with him."

"Indeed!"

"Everell remained with him, but I came away."

The detective looked at Gee without seeing him, just then. The mayor had been with Addison when he was suddenly taken ill. It was a fact worthy of note.

"Do you," asked Gee, with some earnestness, "expect to be an heir in the new will that Addison is alleged to have made?"

"Mr. Gee, why should he make a new will?"

"Well, Homer is dead now."

"What was bequeathed to Homer before?"

"The testator's money, bonds, stocks, and a few minor articles. In case Homer was dead they went to—"

"Whom?"

"Charity."

"Well, Homer has died before his brother. What was the need of a new will?"

Mr. Gee was a mild man. He was never assertive, and, now, his only sign of emotion was a slow rubbing of his hair in the place where ideas ought to lurk, if anywhere.

"I don't see any sign of such a need," he presently replied, "and there may be nothing to it."

"Tell me in detail what happened at Addison's house. Did you know why you were called? Did Everell know? Did Everell want you as a companion witness?"

"I was called in without knowing why I was wanted. I reached there a few moments before the mayor did. Warren was looking pale, but he was apparently as strong as ever then. He did not waste time. Out from a drawer of the table in front of him he drew a wide paper—a folded sheet of fool's-cap."

"Gentlemen," he spoke, abruptly, "I have been drawing up my will, and I want you to witness it!"

"It was a surprise to me, and I think it was to Everell. I had nothing

to say, but the mayor had. As soon as he recovered from his surprise he urged Addison to defer the work until Homer came, reminding the testator that he was expected by every stage.

"Life is uncertain," replied Warren. "Who knows what an hour may bring forth? I have been unpardonably neglectful in the past—I want to do this now. Gentlemen, will you sign?"

"Certainly," I replied.

"Everell was not so ready, but he finally consented. Then Addison shoved the paper into good view—all but the writing—and wrote his name in plain sight of us.

"This," he explained, "is my signature to my will. Sign below, as witnesses."

"It is customary," replied Everell, "for the will to be read before witnesses sign."

"You shall hear it read presently," promised Addison. "Sign!"

"I put my name down, and the mayor did the same. He seemed singularly reluctant about it, and said he regarded it as a sign of bad luck to make a will."

"Sometimes," replied Addison, "it is an act of justice."

"We both signed, and Addison read the will in a firm voice. Its provisions surprised me. I never had heard of you, and when I heard that Misery Mine had been left to one John Frankfort I was puzzled. It was commented upon by Addison."

"Frankfort," he explained, "is the detective of that name. You have witnessed my signature—do not forget its terms!"

"With this he folded the will, and it was done."

Frisco Frank had listened closely.

"Did you object to this disposition of the mine?" he asked.

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

"What did the mayor say?"

"Nothing. I think he was surprised, though. He was standing back of me, and he made a motion as if he would step forward, but he did not. He said nothing."

"What was done with the will?"

"Addison replaced it in his pocket."

"And then?"

"I left the house. I had been busy, and had gone in only with the wish to do a neighborly act. When it was done I returned home."

"And Mayor Everell?"

"Remained with Warren Addison."

It was a significant bit of information to John Frankfort. The mayor had remained with Addison; the latter had soon been taken ill, and—the strange events of the evening had followed.

"Have you talked with the mayor about it since?" inquired Frisco Frank.

"No."

"Do you know where the will is?"

"I do not."

The detective did, but he believed that it would never be proved in court unless at the end of a fight which might not be wholly legal.

"What," he asked, "did you understand by the expression that the making of a will was sometimes an act of justice?"

"Nothing. It was not plain to me, but I think it was no idle remark. Addison was very serious—he had something on his mind."

Frisco Frank's mind went quickly back along the passage of years. Warren Addison had done him a great wrong in the past, but that did not seem to be any reason for leaving him the Misery Mine by will. He recalled that his old foe had been patient under his verbal castigation when they met by the gulch. Perhaps Addison had repented. That was all very well, but it did not satisfy Frankfort as an explanation.

He recalled, too, that on that occasion Addison had earnestly requested him to look into affairs at Glory Gulch before proceeding to hostilities, and had hinted at things not then made clear.

"There is more to this than I can yet see," decided the detective, mentally.

"You should know better than anybody else," added Gee, slowly, "if there was any reason why Addison should want to do an act of justice to you."

"What interests me now," responded Frisco Frank, "is this new will. It annuls the old one. Who profits by the change?"

"Yes; and why was it made? Addison is said to be weak of body and mind. Has he been unduly influenced in the matter?"

"What do you think?"

"People on their death-beds are rarely in condition to dispose of property with reason. If I were you I should feel like bringing up that point."

"You seem to assume that the new will cuts me off."

"It is all guess-work; but report says you are not in favor with those who have charge of Addison. If it should prove that you get the same bequest in the new will I shall be surprised."

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEMAND FOR ADDISON.

Frisco Frank had learned all that Mr. Gee could tell, so he soon took his departure. As he walked away he could see the roof of the Addison house rising above an intervening building. It was as if it skulked in ambush just as the conspirators of Glory Gulch did.

Several hours passed uneventfully, but the detective was doing some thinking, and he finally decided to have a talk with Sheriff Dowe when he met him. The afternoon was well advanced when he next saw the local officer. Dowe looked weary and annoyed.

"What luck?" asked Frisco Frank

"Vile luck," exclaimed Dowe.

"What is wrong?"

"I know less about this affair than I did when I began."

"What have you learned?"

"Nothing! I shall not learn anything, unless the slayer of Homer Addison comes forward and owns up. How can I? The whole range of the Sierra Nevadas stretches away to the north and south. There is room for the whole of the murderers of California to hide there, and how am I to track them? Trails amount to but little around here, and this trail has neither beginning nor end. It does not exist. There is no footprint, literally or figuratively."

"I should not expect anything from hunting for footprints on the range. Theory is the thing in this case, sheriff."

"Everybody says the Gold-Dusters did it."

"If there is a time to doubt a theory it is when everybody agrees upon it. Sheriff, there is just one thing for you to do."

"What?"

"See Warren Addison."

"But Doctor Gifford refuses to let anybody in."

"Is he absolute monarch in Glory Gulch?"

"He seems to be."

"He represents the medical profession—you the law. This is a time when law calls loudly to be heard. Pills and plasters should take a back seat."

"But Gifford says Addison is too weak to see any one."

"He is strong enough to make his will."

"That does look strange, doesn't it? I should say he might see me. But Gifford says that Addison knows nothing as to how it occurred."

"In a case of pneumonia a sick man would not consult a sheriff; in a case of detective work a doctor knows about as much as a child. You should see Addison, ask him questions, and get his version of the case. That's your duty, sheriff."

"Gifford will refuse me entrance."

"Insist upon going in."

"Say, Frankfort, I'll do it, if you will keep me company. I rather hesitate to take so much responsibility myself; but, with you to back me up, I'll go—"

"Done! Come on!"

Frisco Frank did not intend to let the opportunity pass, and he rose promptly and stood ready to go. Dowe's courage had not been well to the front, but he now caught the fever, and was ready to make the attempt with zeal. They took their way toward Addison's house, and no time was lost on the journey.

The house was unusually quiet, and they could see no sign of life; but a knock at the door brought a woman to view. Frisco Frank recognized her instinctively. He had wondered what the housekeeper was like; he now had a chance to see.

She was of middle age, and far from being the grim and sinister-looking guardian he had expected to see. She was plump and rosy, and, on the whole, had a prepossessing appearance that was not in keeping with the character of those she was serving.

"Good-afternoon, Mrs. Beese," was Dowe's polite greeting. "We have come to see Warren Addison."

"Oh, sheriff, you can't!" she exclaimed. "He is not able."

"Sick, is he?"

"Very, very sick, poor man!"

"Our visit will cheer him up. Besides, this is a matter of law. The law is supreme, you know."

"Does it kill sick men?" asked Mrs. Beese, reproachfully.

"It does nothing of the sort. Have no fear. We will deal gently with your master. All we desire is to ask him some questions. Desperate deeds have been done in this town, Mrs. Beese, and the crime will never be solved unless we can see Warren. By getting information from him we can—"

"The doctor has ordered that his patient see nobody until he is better, sir."

"Gifford speaks for medicine; I speak for law. We must see Warren for a few moments, but we will not tire him out nor make him nervous."

"I shall have to say 'No' to you!" answered the housekeeper, more firmness creeping into her voice. "Mr. Warren's life must be guarded. I cannot admit you."

Dowe cast a glance toward Frisco Frank. He was wondering just how he ought to deal with this woman; but all questions on that head were rendered unnecessary by a new departure. Quick footsteps sounded, and Pownall Gifford himself came hurrying along the street.

"He suspects our errand," thought Frankfort.

The suspicion seemed to be well-founded. Gifford's face was flushed and angry and his haste was noticeable. He strode up with long steps, and his voice rung out sharply.

"What's going on here?"

"We are here to see Warren Addison," replied Dowe, half timidly.

"Haven't I told you that he is not in condition to see anybody?"

"That was some time ago—"

"I will let you know when you can see him. You can't do it now."

"But, doctor, law and justice—"

"The slayer of Homer Addison is somewhere in these mountains, I suppose. Go and find him, if you wish; I can't have my patient meddled with now."

"But he was able to make his will this morning—"

Gifford turned upon Frisco Frank.

"This is your work!" he bitterly exclaimed. "You are interfering with what does not concern you in the least. This is not your case. Why do you spur Dowe on to commit infamy?"

"Pardon me, doctor; but there is no infamy intended by us. We seek to do only what justice demands. We shall not injure Addison in the least. A few minutes of quiet talk will not weary or excite him to a dangerous degree, and law and justice—"

"I have heard all this before. I don't want to hear it again. I am physician here, and I shall defend the rights and the life of my patient. You cannot see him!"

The doctor looked at Frisco Frank with dogged firmness and plain hostility. He seemed ready to fight if words failed.

"Do you defy the law?" demanded the detective.

"In this case, yes."

"Are you willing to take the responsibility—"

"Fully!"

"And give Homer's assassin time to escape?"

"I will not allow the living brother to be sacrificed for the dead."

"Have you no faith in our discretion?"

"No."

"Think twice, Doctor Gifford."

"I have thought; I shall act if my patient is meddled with, sir!"

Frisco Frank turned to his companion.

"Sheriff Dowe, you know your duty."

"I do, and I'm going in!"

With this stubborn decision the sheriff took a forward step, but the result did not surprise Frisco Frank. The doctor was directly in their path now—he drew a revolver with a jerk and stood his ground.

"Stop!" he commanded. "If you move this way I'll shoot you dead!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FEUD GROWS BITTER.

There was a full stop. Dowe and Frisco Frank were looking into the muzzle of the revolver, and they knew perfectly well that Pownall Gifford would carry out his threat. Sincerity sounded plainly in his tense, hostile voice, and that the revolver was loaded was certain. Empty weapons were not carried in Glory Gulch.

The sheriff hesitated; then he moved back a little and turned his gaze upon his ally. It was a silent notification that he resigned in favor of the man from San Francisco.

The detective had never presented a calmer front.

"Gifford," he spoke, in an even voice, "do you realize what you are doing?"

"Fully!" retorted the doctor. "More, I know what I am going to do if you try to force your way in. I shall shoot to kill!"

"This is a lawless step."

"Call it what you will. I have my professional honor to consider. Warren Addison's life is not to be trifled with by you. As his physician I hold to my purpose. Keep off! Keep off, or get filled with lead!"

"Doctor," pursued Frisco Frank, in his strangely even tone, "on this earth there are many things that call for notice because they are powerful. Above all ranks the law. The law, with its mighty machinery! Men may defy it, and success may crown their efforts for a while, but their day is short, and when it ends—then the law is merciless!"

"Threats do not worry me. You shall not enter here!" stubbornly repeated the man with the revolver. "I mean business. As true as you are a living man now, you will be a dead one if you seek to pass me!"

"Doctor Gifford," bluntly continued Frisco Frank, "why are you afraid to let us see your patient?"

The question created consternation for two men. Sheriff Dowe had never dreamed of carrying the crusade so far, and he was dumfounded at his ally's choice of words. Gifford was hit equally hard, it seemed, for his expression betrayed strong emotion.

"Afraid?" he echoed, with sudden unsteadiness.

"Just so."

"I am not afraid. Why should I be?"

"That's it—why? What secret are you hiding?"

"By Judas, sir, I don't like your remarks!" cried Gifford.

"I did not expect you would."

"You insult me, sir."

"I ask a plain question. The claim that it will harm your patient for us to see him for a moment is all gammon; you know it would do nothing of the kind, and that is not your actual reason.

I ask you again, why are you afraid to have us see him?"

"If you say I am, you lie!" hotly exclaimed the doctor.

"Who are you that seeks to run all of Glory Gulch? Are you an absolute monarch here? Can you defy law, reason and justice? When we try to get track of a murderer, why do you shield him?"

"I, sir—shield a murderer?"

"That was my query."

"By my life, I will not submit to this longer! Your course is infamous, infamous! How dare you use a reputable physician thus? Dowe, do you take the responsibility for such a course?"

"No, I don't!" declared the alarmed sheriff. "Frankfort, you are going too far; you are mad. I will not let you speak in this way for me."

"Then I speak for myself. I demand that you let me see Warren Addison, sir!"

"I will not!" retorted Gifford, encouraged by Dowe's downfall.

"Let me pass!"

Frisco Frank took a forward step, but the revolver wavered for an instant and then bore fully upon him.

"I will shoot!—I swear it!" cried Gifford.

The detective stopped with his face almost touching the weapon. He was close to death, and he knew it, but he was the calmest man there.

"Enough!" he replied, with icy composure. "I wanted our relative positions made plain. It has been done. I am a detective, and you have interfered with me in the discharge of my duty. That may count for but little in Glory Gulch, but there are higher tribunals than exist in this mining camp. You will hear from me again!"

He backed off. Just then he did not care to give Pownall Gifford too much chance—he believed the man would gladly shoot him in the back; and he was watching his face, his hand, his weapon—even his nerves, as it were, with cat-like caution.

Gifford was silent. He watched his opponent go. Frisco Frank wasted no more time, and, when such a course seemed safe, he turned and walked rapidly off. He had not stayed to look at Dowe, but, presently, heavy breathing was followed by the appearance of that valiant official.

"Oh! what have you done?" exclaimed Dowe.

"Not much. Did you do more?"

"You have—ah!—talked harshly to Gifford."

"Yes."

"I never thought of such a thing. It was all right to try to see Warren, but to accuse the doctor, to anger him so—Why, he is a powerful man here, and a particular friend of Mayor Everell."

"In other words, you are afraid of him."

"Why should we quarrel with the leading men of the town? When a new sheriff is elected—why, they will oppose me!"

Frisco Frank stopped short.

"I do not think they will," he calmly answered. "They will be in favor of your re-election. Why? Because you are zealous and successful in discharge of your official duties? No! Because you are a creature of wax in their hands. They will vote for you—unless there are changes in Glory Gulch before that day. Good-afternoon, sheriff!"

Waving his hand, the detective moved on rapidly, shaking off his late associate so perceptibly that Dowe remained silent and submitted in confused uncertainty. Their union was at an end.

Frisco Frank did not pause until he was at the hotel. When he entered that place he was outwardly calm and easy of manner. The interview had resulted just as he expected, and he saw no reason to get excited over it.

He had forced the opposition to show its hand; he was ready for the future.

He inquired for Little Alf, but the youth was not in the hotel. Similar ill

luck attended his efforts to find Robert Rover, and it became clear that a part of his business would have to wait.

After supper he left the hotel and walked toward the West Slope again. Twilight was at hand, and the miners were lounging about after their day's work. Some of their talk floated to Frisco Frank as he passed, but he heard no mention of the affair that was interesting him so much.

"This is Glory Gulch," he mused, "land of crime, tragedy and gold. The hours since murder was done here have barely stretched into days, yet the matter has grown dim in their minds. Nothing so plainly tells of the littleness of man as the quickness with which the dead are dropped by the living. We live, move, have our friends—we die, and we make no pulsation of the air when our own breath has ceased to fan it. Man is smaller on earth than the pebble he kicks contemptuously from his path. He dies; the pebble remains."

By this time the house of Oliver Gee was reached. Frisco Frank knocked, was admitted, and was soon in conversation with Gee. He lost little time in coming to business.

"I hear," he remarked, "that the murdered man is to be buried to-morrow morning?"

"Yes."

"With Gifford and Everell to water the grave with tears."

"Yes, and plant a stone to his memory. Such a stone is already shaped and carved, and it will be set up immediately."

"Is this to prevent all doubts as to who lies there?"

"Everell came to me to subscribe something, and he said it was a kindly deed to a worthy stranger in our town."

"The mayor has a happy flow of language. Mr. Gee, you know Warren Addison well?"

"Yes."

"I am curious to learn just how much his dead brother looked like him. Will you oblige me by going to see the body to-night, and then look it over carefully. Note just how much it is like Warren."

"But it is very much like him. That was noticed by all when Homer Addison came in on the stage, and pretty much the whole town saw the new-comer then and commented upon it. I have seen the remains since, but the explosion makes a critical survey impossible. I can only say that the resemblance is still marked. Despite the blackened wounds made by the explosion of the powder, no one could fail to recognize Warren's brother."

"Yet, I wish you would look again."

"Why?"

"I want a reliable identification."

"Do you doubt that the dead man is Addison?"

"Not at all."

"Then why this step?"

"Frankly, I have been severely rebuffed there, and I want some witness of my own. I want a reliable man to certify that he is dead."

"This seems to me a singular step, but I will do as you say."

"It will please me very much. Make a plausible excuse and go. Once there, be thorough. You had no real acquaintance with Homer, so imagine you are looking as Warren. He is your model. Look sharp!"

CHAPTER XVII.

STARTLING MEETINGS.

Gee looked at his companion in silence for a moment. There was much in his manner that Frisco Frank expected to hear expressed in words, but, instead, Gee suddenly rose.

"I will go," he replied. "Wait for me here."

The speaker left the house and the detective was alone. To him there must have been something of interest in the affair, but his demeanor remained calm and easy. At the end of twenty minutes Gee returned.

"You have made a quick examination," Frisco Frank observed.

"I have made none."

"No?"

"I was not allowed to see the body."

"Who forbade it?"

"I saw Gifford. I will not say he refused in the full sense of the word, but he stated that the body was in its coffin, and fully prepared for burial. Practically, he declined to exhibit it, for he opposed all of my arguments, but it was quietly done."

"I am not surprised."

"Mr. Frankfort, what suspicion have you in mind?"

"I reply, how do we know that Homer Addison lies dead there? It would have been easy, if Warren Addison, Gifford and the gang wished to reach a certain end, to substitute some other body. Perhaps Homer's life was heavily insured. Maybe he is alive now, and hiding in the mountains. Maybe there is a big plot to accomplish some dishonest end. Understand, I do not charge it; I suggest the possibility. Now, excuse me if I do not go further into particulars, and—will you remain silent?"

"Fully, sir!"

"Good! I feel that I can trust you in the interests of justice. I will take your time no longer."

Frisco Frank rose, and, after some further talk, left the house.

He did not feel like seeking his hotel, and the moon invited him to more congenial spots. He walked on until he was beyond the line of houses and fully in the unsettled district. It was a surrounding that soothed his spirits and made him feel at peace with the world. The rocks, the trees near-by, and the mighty peaks of the range that, not far away, towered so high in air, were all agreeable to him.

He reached a level, open spot, and was crossing in the moonlight, when he suddenly perceived another person just ahead of him, and advancing toward him. More, the other traveler was a woman.

Believing that it was not of interest to him how many women crossed his path, he kept on at an even pace. He met the other stroller.

First, he saw that she was young and pretty, but this was only the beginning. His indifference vanished; he stopped short, and she did the same.

For a moment they stood and looked at each other in the moonlight—then she abruptly aroused and walked on. Her gaze fell; he could not look into her eyes, but his own gaze devoured her face.

She passed him; she continued to walk quickly; she crossed the level and disappeared among the rocks that lay nearer Glory Gulch.

Frisco Frank, aroused, started nervously.

"Dorothy!"

It was not a call to her—it was no more than a whisper from his lips that could not have been heard a dozen yards away; but it was full of meaning and feeling. He continued to look after her, but he saw her not. The moon poured down its light, and the place was as fair as ever, but he realized it not. He was alone.

"Dorothy! And it is thus we meet after all these years!"

He was no longer the cool detective, and so absorbed was he in his thoughts it was well that no enemy was near then to molest him.

Presently he bestirred himself again. It had been Peter West's daughter. Once she had been his own promised wife, but the shadow of Warren Addison's false charge came between them. John Frankfort had gone from Glory Gulch under a ban—she had remained.

It was thus they met after all the years.

Rapidly the detective walked on for several minutes. Then he stopped, flung himself down by a rock and seemed to lose all sense of what was transpiring

around him. Really, there were but few minutes in his life that he was forgetful of prudence.

Again there was a lapse of time; then he raised his head a little and seemed to listen. There was a rustling on the opposite side of the rock at his back. He noted it; he became alert.

Anon a thin, twisting object sailed over the rock. It might have been a snake in spring, but it was something different. Frisco Frank threw up his arm, struck the object aside and then leaped to his feet.

He stood facing three men, one of whom held a lasso in his hand. A cast had been made; it had failed.

As far as motion went, the unknown three might for awhile have been stones themselves. They did not stir, and the detective had time to take them in fully. There was only one thing remarkable about them—they wore masks, and that was not a fashion in Glory Gulch.

"Well," sharply demanded Frisco Frank, "what next?"

"Say, we missed!" muttered one of the trio.

"Yes, you missed," agreed Frankfort.

"Why did you try it?"

"Pard, jest you hand over yer stray dust an' we won't hurt ye."

"Would you rob me?"

"That is w'ot we're hyer fer."

"Do I look like a walking goldmine?"

"All we ask is that you fork over what yer have. Be it little or be it much, it will be welcome ter a good cause."

"Suppose I put my cash down—can I then go free?"

"Yes. All we want is the dust."

"I think I know you. Your masks—of which I have heard before—and your demand, recall the Gold-Dusters of this region."

"We are the Gold-Dusters."

"Mine-robbers and petty highwaymen. Yes, I've heard of you. Well, you will not get a cent out of me!"

"Hold on, pard, hold on! Count us!"

"Three!"

"Count yerself!"

"Five!"

"Ther blazes yer are! What sort o' rethmatic do ye use?"

"That of power. Don't get the notion into your heads that I fear you, for it will be a perversion of the facts. I have seen much better men. Once there were road-agents in the region around Glory Gulch—bold, dashing, red-handed fellows—who filled the public heart with awe, rage and admiration. You came after them as the buzzard comes for the carrion the well-fed grizzly leaves behind him. I have heard you called the sneak-thieves of road-agentism."

"That'll do!" roared the spokesman.

"You can't insult us. The Gold-Dusters will show you this night what sort of mettle they possess. 'Tis the mettle of the untamed stallion and the hungry lion. Men, advance and seize this fellow. We will give him a lesson!"

The spokesman had held a revolver. Now he started to raise it, but he was a world too slow. Frisco Frank's own revolver flashed to a position where he was ready to fire.

"Stop!" he cried, sharply. "I have the drop on you!"

The Gold-Duster's hand was arrested half-way.

"Say, you're a fool!" he exclaimed. "Don't you see we are three ter one? We kin do ye up without winkin'. Be reasonable! Ef you'll yank out yer dust we'll forgive all you've said. Men, go on an' tie the critter up!"

The lesser Dusters had produced ropes, but once more they were led to halt. Frisco Frank advanced several steps until he was close enough to make matters critical.

"Let this stop!" he commanded. "I won't have any more of idle talk from you. Here, you fellow with the nimble tongue, are you Chief Duster?"

"I regret to say he is not here."

"I am sorry for it, too."

"He is a bold fellow, while the rest of us like peace at any price. If he had been here, thar would have been blood shed before now."

The masked man talked as if he meant all he said, but Frisco Frank was growing suspicious of him. Such remarkable gentleness and timidity was not usual in a robber. The detective set him down as a man of cunning, and himself grew more alert.

A trap might lurk behind his mild exterior.

Turning his head quickly he cast a glance behind him. He saw enough there to interest him at once. Only a few feet away, partly but ineffectually screened by a wide-spreading tree, another masked man stood with a lasso revolving in his hand.

Even as Frisco Frank looked the rope shot toward him, and with such good aim that its results, if left alone, were not to be mistaken.

Like a flash the imperilled man leaped to one side.

The noose passed harmlessly and fell to the earth.

"Forward!" shouted the leader. "The jig is up!—forward!"

Together they bounded toward the detective, but his eyes were fully open now. He had to deal with desperate men, and he would not hesitate. Again his revolver came up—he pulled the trigger.

There was a discharge—the leader uttered a howl of pain and stopped short. It seemed, however, that Frisco Frank must fight three men, but, at this juncture, still another person bounded into the circle with a cheerful outcry:

"Count me in! When the bullets whiz I want my share. Frisco Frank, here's the bully boy of the ranges. Count me in!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SECRET CIPHER.

As the moonlight fell upon the man who had spoken last there was a peculiar glimmer, but it was all easily to be understood by one who knew him. It was Barachias Bee, with his ornaments of spectacles.

But Barachias was more than a walking advertisement then. He appeared with a revolver in each hand, and, when the Gold-Dusters still pressed forward, he added his efforts to those of Frisco Frank.

There was a succession of shots in which both sides took part, but the fusillade did not last long. The Gold-Dusters seemed to find matters too warm for them; they broke and, with two exceptions, fled.

The exceptions had been as anxious to go as the rest, but the brief though rapid revolutions of the combatants had placed them in a niche where they were practically prisoners.

With the others gone, all attention was centred upon them, and when Barachias flourished his revolvers wildly they loudly begged for mercy.

"Down with your weapons, then!" commanded Frisco Frank.

The articles named went rattling to the ground.

"Barachias, shoot them!" ordered the detective.

Howls of terror rose from the Dusters.

"Spare them until I sell them a pair of specks!" requested the vendor of blue glasses.

"We want a further look at them. I'll keep them under subjection with this revolver, and do you tie them to yonder tree. There's a lasso to do it with."

"And here's a man to do the tying," added Barachias. "I'll fix them so that only an earthquake will set them loose."

The peddler proved to be skillful, and, as the Dusters dared not resist, he soon had them tied fast to the tree. Frisco Frank came forward and removed the masks.

"The shadows fall thickly here," he observed. "I can't say whether I know them or not."

"I have matches by the quart. Wait!"

Barachias ignited a match and held it close to their faces. As they burned out he added others, but finally Frisco Frank reached a conclusion.

"I don't know them."

"Look again!" suggested Barachias, with a grin. "Look closer—so!"

He thrust his match so close to the nose of one of the pair that he howled with pain and fear.

"What's the matter?" Bee asked, with an air of innocence.

"You burned me, hang you!"

"Friend, I was trying an experiment. I noticed that your nose was very red. The question was whether it would ignite or explode. You must use good paint—the red is beautiful, and it's a fast color. Now, it seems proof against fire—"

He touched the match fully to the nose, whereupon he provoked a louder howl than before.

"Forbear!" directed Frisco Frank. "Dusters they may be, but we will use no cruelty."

"If I have hurt the gentleman's feelings, I am sorry, I do assure him. It is not my nature to injure beast, bird or man, and he must come under one of the five heads. Friend, there is balm for every woe. Let me sell you some balm. Here you will see a choice assortment of spectacles, nose-pinchers and eye-glasses of all sorts, but all of standard excellence. All of blue glass, too. Glasses to sell! Pard, they will take the fire out of that nose quicker than you can drink whisky. Will you buy?"

Barachias had whipped out several pairs of his treasures. He held them all before the bound men, using the skill of long practice.

"Blue glass," he added, with enthusiasm, "will cure all ills. Rheumatism, jaundice, spavin and heaves succumb to it like a streak of harnessed broncho. It cures measles, evil eye and broken hearts. Do you suffer from ivy poison, toothache, dropsy or fleas? Buy a pair of specks and you will be a well man again!"

All of the glasses but one he replaced in his pocket, and that one he fitted to the nose of the nearest prisoner and then stepped back to observe the effect.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" he exclaimed, admiringly.

"I think your wares are not appreciated," observed Frisco Frank.

"Wait!—just you wait until you see my order. You don't know the Gold-Dusters as I do. They suffer from all sorts of eye trouble. Watch me and I'll sell to the whole band. Gents, shall I book your order? Discount of ten per centum to families, orphan asylums and road-agents. Sent C. O. D. or delivered by B. Bee at this depot of traffic. Glasses to sell!? Do you buy? Best articles in the business, and all made personally by B. Bee!"

"You will make no sale here—"

Frisco Frank really thought that Barachias was in earnest, and he began this remark, but the peddler interrupted:

"You mistake, sir! I never missed a customer yet. I will please these gentlemen if I have to send back to my factory for more specks. They will wait while I send."

Maintaining a perfectly serious face Barachias tried on several more pairs, but even his hobby and his erratic posing to see the effect palled upon the detective.

"These men are strangers to us," he remarked, "but I want to discover their identity if I can. Stand back and let me search them."

The Gold-Dusters had endured Barachias's recreation with sullen reserve, but they showed more animation at this juncture. They did not want to be searched, it was plain, but this only settled the case.

Frankfort went through their pockets, but, to him, it seemed that the reward was small. A few weapons, and the minor articles that men commonly carried in their pockets seemed to be all—

with one exception. One of the pair had a folded paper, and when Barachias lighted another match it proved to be a secret cipher.

Here was some food for investigation, if it could be deciphered, and Frisco Frank stowed it away in his own pocket.

"Take your spectacles, Mr. Bee," he directed. "We will go now."

"So we will. These cheap Jacks haven't money enough to buy such splendid wares as I sell, and even blue glass would never heal their moral wounds. Farewell, Mister Road-Agents! You must part from these eye-glasses never to see them again."

They turned away, but a doleful cry rose from the prisoners against the injustice of leaving them in their present condition. They declared that they would starve, but they were unheeded. Frisco Frank knew their companions must be near, and that succor would soon come. They were left accordingly.

"Not a very heroic lot," observed Barachias.

"They have been described to me as the sneak-thieves of road-agents, and the term fits well. They are vicious enough when they have everything their own way, but arrant cowards at heart."

"Do you think you can read that paper?"

"That depends. A common secret cipher, so called, is easily read by one who understands the art."

"Pard, it may be an order for my spectacles. If it proves so lose no time in getting word to me."

"Mr. Bee, do you really sell those blue glasses?"

"I don't give them away. Didn't you buy a pair?"

"Yes. Have you seen me wear it?"

"No, but I've noticed an improvement in your health," promptly answered Barachias.

They returned to the hotel at once, and Frisco Frank went to his room. There he sat down to study the cipher. It was made of peculiar lines and angles, but it did not take him long to satisfy himself that it was readable.

Applying the well-known rules of the art to the case he soon gained light, and he continued the work until all was made out. Then he had this missive before him:

"Keep shady! There is thus far no suspicion among the men of Glory Gulch. Occasionally there is mention of the Gold-Dusters, but it is only vague. Even the sheriff has not faith enough in the theory to follow up the clew. He works at random, and the killing bids fair to remain a permanent mystery. Addison will soon be buried, and when it is done there will be little more said about it. Men are too busy in the land of gold to worry long over a dead man, be his taking off ever so mysterious. The band is safe. Lie low! Fear nothing! Orders for another job will soon be sent."

There the missive ended. Frisco Frank laid it down, raised his head and meditated. Then he picked it up and read again.

He shook his head slowly.

"If I believe what I can see on the surface I must credit the possibility that the murder was done by the Gold-Dusters. Shall I commit myself to that theory?"

He handled the paper restlessly.

"In crime many men are fools. Strange mistakes are made. One was made here. If this is what it purports to be the writer was a fool to commit himself on paper. If it is only an attempt to cast unjust suspicion on the Gold-Dusters, another mistake has been made. I have use for this paper."

The detective put it carefully away. A listener would have found it hard to reconcile his line of argument with existing facts, and he did not see all clearly, but he intended that the document should play a part in the future.

"I have not seen the last of the Gold-Dusters," he murmured.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MYSTERY OF CLAIM 47.

The next day there was a gathering at the Addison house early in the forenoon. The gathering was not large. It was known that the murdered man was to be buried, but Glory Gulch was a busy town, and as long as there was gold to be dug from the auriferous soil, the men were not going to worry themselves to pay any final tribute to a stranger.

Enough of the stronger sex came to make a respectable show, and there was only one thing that prevented a large gathering of women—there were not enough of that sex there to block the streets. Curiosity brought the greater proportion of those in camp.

Frisco Frank did not attend. Convinced that there would be nothing to interest him he kept out of sight, but he watched from a distance.

A fairly level plot of ground had early been set apart for a burial place, and to this the procession wended its way in due time. From an elevated point Frankfort saw the interment and the setting of the stone. Then the entire party returned to the town and the silent sleeper was left alone.

The detective waited half an hour, and then descended to the spot.

Glory Gulch had a fairly good master of such ceremonies, and the grave looked neat and orderly. Frisco Frank gave it but little heed. He walked around to where he could see the front of the headstone and then read the inscription:

HOMER ADDISON.

AGED ABOUT THIRTY YEARS.

I REST HERE IN SLEEP FOREVER.

This, with the exception of the date, was all. The charitable men of Glory Gulch had paid their tribute, and this was the result. The neat grave, the well-marked stone, and a memory were all that remained of one who had met a violent death in the camp.

The inscription seemed to have a fascination for Frisco Frank. He remained gazing at it for several minutes. What was in his mind was best known to himself, but his abstraction was such that he did not hear the approach of another person until footsteps sounded almost beside him. Then he looked up suddenly.

Another man was there. He was well along in years, with hair that was very gray, a shabby suit of clothes and a bent form which made a pronounced curve of his spinal column.

At first sight the detective believed he was looking at an entire stranger, but the old man began to nod his head and smile in a way which indicated a desire to get into his companion's good graces.

"Mr. Frankfort, I believe," he muttered, half apologetically.

"That's my name, sir."

"Don't—don't you know me?"

"I cannot say that I do. Yet, wait! There is something familiar—are you Peter West?"

"Yes, sir. I am Peter West."

Frisco Frank held out his hand. His acquaintance of the past had been casual rather than intimate, but there had been some association between the owner of Claim 47 and himself.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. West," he remarked.

"Are you?—are you, really?"

The old man's face lighted up, but it was the delight of a child. The expression, if nothing else, told how much he was broken of mind.

"Certainly, Mr. West. You are one of the old residents of Glory Gulch, you know—you date back to my own residence here."

"Yes, yes, I was here then; I knew you well. I was one of your best friends—always your friend, my boy!"

There was no real foundation for this assertion, but West appeared anxious to have it so, and he shook Frisco Frank's hand with warmth and kept his hold.

"Always your friend!" he added, pertinaciously.

"That's pleasant, Mr. West."

"Very pleasant, very! I have watched you, my boy. You went out into the world, as young men do, and you have fought and won. You are a great man now—a great man! You are quoted from Mexico to the British colonies. Chief of Police in San Francisco, eh? That's a big position to fill."

"Only a detective, Mr. West."

"Same thing, same thing! You've got to be a great man. Well, I have been quite successful, myself—qui-i-ite successful!"

Peter drew himself up a little, as if with pride, and seemed so sure of his own statement that he prolonged his words as much as possible. It was a melancholy assumption of what did not exist, for he should have known that it was common history that Claim 47 was the most barren soil in Glory Gulch, or around it.

Frisco Frank felt only pity, and he answered kindly:

"You still have the old mine, Mr. West, do you not?"

"Yes, yes, Claim 47. It is too good a property to sell. Sir, within the heart of that claim, within the bosom of the earth, ay, close to where we are working now, lurk riches beyond estimation. All the signs go to prove it."

"You have worked the mine some years."

"Ye-e-es, about eleven, but it was not until lately that I had modern machinery and appliances to do as I wished. Now I have all, and I shall be well repaid. Everything goes to show that wonderful riches will soon be found—the signs are just right. We have cross-cut mineralized gangue and decomposed porphyry, of late, and bunches of high-grade ore were found scattered through the mass. Very soon we shall strike it rich. There is such a marked resemblance between the porphyry and phonolite to that of richer mines that I cannot be in doubt. Ah, ah! the old claim will yet pan out rich!"

West rubbed his hands and manifested elation, but Frisco Frank felt only pity. It was sad to see the old man dreaming idly over the worthless mine.

"Mr. West, about what is your total yield per year?" he asked.

"Yield?—per year? Oh! well—hum!—I can't say to an ounce of dust."

"This high-grade ore you have spoken of—what will it average in gold?"

"We haven't quite got to that, sir, but the clear ore under it—ah! that is the thing we are after."

"Are you sole owner of Claim 47?"

West shifted uneasily from one foot to another.

"Ye-es. Oh! yes, sir; yes, yes!" he replied, beginning hesitatingly, and then changing to eager emphasis. "Why do you ask? Do you wish to buy a share?"

"Is there any encumbrance?"

Again the old man was worried. His expression became downcast.

"Only a trifle," he finally replied.

"Who holds the encumbrance?—the claim upon the mine?"

"Well, really, is it necessary to mention that?"

"Decidedly!"

"But it is a friend who will not press me."

"What friend?"

"As long as you wish to buy in, I will tell you. Yes, I will tell you. I will inform you. Yes, I will tell you. I will inform you. I will explain."

Peter was nervous and confused. He wanted to put Claim 47 in its best light, but the fact was there was no good light. He repeated himself simply because he did not know what else to say. It occurred to Frisco Frank that the man who had taken advantage of this broken old miner was a knave of the worst sort—and he had been told that the schemer was Warren Addison.

"Well, his name?" patiently asked Frankfort.

"To be frank, I don't know."

"Don't know? How can that be?"

"You shall hear, sir. I have a friend,

a very good friend, who has—well, loaned me some money, but he has done it very unostentatiously, sir—very! He has kept even me in ignorance of his identity."

"Impossible!"

"It is true, sir."

"How can it be? How can he have loaned you money without your knowing who he was?"

"I have never seen him except when he was masked."

"This grows remarkable. Masked, eh? A masked loaner! Explain!"

"Well, he has come to me whenever I needed money, and given it, but never openly. First, he came and said to me that he had heard that I needed money to work the mine. I told him that was right, and he gave me what was necessary. Then he told me when I needed more to leave a note in a hollow tree that he told me about, and that he would always show up and hand over what was needed."

"And he has done it?"

"Yes."

"With a mask on his face?"

"Always!"

"But you signed notes, or something of that sort?"

"Yes."

"To whom were they payable?"

"I don't know. They always were filled out in full with one exception—the name was left out, and he filled it in when he was gone, or that was what he said he was going to do, at least."

"Mr. West, this is a strange affair."

"Oh! not so very, not so very."

"Do you really mean that you don't know the identity of this man?"

"I don't know it. I have asked him, but he never would tell. He kept his secret, but— isn't he a good friend to me?"

CHAPTER XX.

FRISCO FRANK'S SURPRISE.

Peter West rubbed his hands together and tried to show enthusiasm, but it was a wretched failure. Weak of mind he was in many respects, but it was clear that he realized in a great degree just how miserably he was a slave to the masked man.

Frisco Frank went on inexorably.

"How much do you owe him?"

"I have not figured it up lately," replied Peter.

"What did it foot up when last figured?"

"I don't exactly remember."

"Let me see your figures."

"I haven't them here."

"Go to your house and get them."

Once more the old miner was taken with a fit of fidgets. He shifted his position, and kept up shifting it, but no movement was toward his house.

"Be frank," urged the detective. "Do you know the amount of the indebtedness? Have you anything by which it can be learned?"

"Well, no, I haven't. You see, what does it matter? I'm not good at figures, and I have just let him keep the books. I knew all along that when we struck real pay-dirt it would be so rich that the small sums he had loaned me would be of no account in comparison."

"He has paid for working the mine, and for all the modern machinery you now use, has he?"

"Ye-es."

"Is that a small bill?"

"In comparison with what the mine is going to yield, when we strike pay-dirt—yes, sir, yes!"

Frisco Frank was silent. He clearly saw how West had been led on and humbugged. He was not so clear in estimating the exact scope of the plot. He had heard the rumor that Warren Addison was doing this, and acting to get Peter so fully in his power that Dorothy would have to marry him to save her father from mental ruin and collapse. Now, he was not so sure that his information had been right. If this was the plot, why had not the trap been sprung?

The detective's silence gave West a chance to return to his new idea.

"Now, Mr. Frankfort, if you want two-thirds of the mine you can have it. Maybe it will all be in the family later on. You used to like my Dorothy. Why have you come back here, unless you wanted to see her? If you like her, take two-thirds of the mine and it will all be yours and hers when I die."

"Dorothy!" murmured Frisco Frank.

"A good girl, sir, a most noble girl!"

"True."

"Will you take the mine—and Dorothy?"

Peter had suddenly grown eager. His old eyes lighted up and he straightened his bent form noticeably. He had a hobby that pleased him, and he wanted to see it carried out. He had come to Frankfort with that object and no other.

"What does Dorothy say?" asked Frisco Frank.

"I have not asked her. I thought maybe she would—that is, it will be just as well for you and her to settle that."

"Right, Mr. West, right! I forbid you to mention me in any way to her. But—does she ever mention me?"

"Often, Mr. Frankfort, often!"

"What does she say?"

"Oh, I tell her you are a fine man, and she says she has heard of your good detective work; and then I tell her how great a business head you have, and she says it takes brains to succeed in detective work. And the other day I told her you would make a good husband, and she said she had heard you were never unkind to prisoners. You see, sir, she praises you highly."

If Frankfort did not see that, he did discern the natural evasions of a skillful woman, and he could understand that Peter had been urging the point with Dorothy only to have his attempts evaded persistently.

It occurred to him that diplomacy and consideration for Dorothy alike required him to drop this subject, and he headed Peter off just as he was going to begin another speech.

"This masked man," he interrupted.

"When did you see him last?"

"A month ago."

"Where is this hollow tree where you leave letters for him?"

"Over yonder, not a quarter of a mile away. It's the one with the broken branch that hangs straight down."

"I see it. Mr. West, do you want my help in this?"

"Yes."

"Then write to your unknown and tell him you want to see him."

"I will, Mr. Frankfort."

"It is high time that you knew him. Write and tell him to call on you at a stated time. Does he come to your house?"

"Oh, no; we meet at the mine, by night."

"Good! Let the next meeting be called for that place. I want to be at hand; I want to see your unknown friend."

"You—you won't do anything to annoy him?"

Peter was struck with a sudden fear, but Frisco Frank quieted him.

"Rely upon me, sir. I will deal with the case with prudence. I want to know who he is, but I want him to remain ignorant of my interest in the case. I want to keep out of his sight. More, I want you to drop my name in talking with Dorothy. In brief, I desire you to be silent about me to all."

The miner thought he saw his way clear to new successes as he regarded these steps, and he promised readily. Some further time was devoted to impressing the need of secrecy upon him, and then they parted. West moved away with his form bent and shaky, but there was a new elasticity to his step.

He thought he saw his way clear to get more money for Claim 47.

"Unfortunate man!" muttered the detective. "He has gone daft over his barren mine, and the difficulties he has got into cannot be computed. It is common talk that he is many thousands of dol-

lars in debt, but it seems that even he does not know how much the amount is. The case is pitiful, both for him and Dorothy. Poor Dorothy!"

Frisco Frank was ready to go back, but he paused to look at the headstone again. There it was, with its lettered attempt to keep Homer Addison's memory in mind, but, as the detective looked, a smile appeared on his face.

"The half is not told!" he murmured. He turned and went down the hill.

Returning to the hotel he again inquired and searched for Little Alf, but the youth was not to be found. His continued absence, coupled with that of Robert Rover, was suggestive.

The detective went to his private room. It was half an hour later when he was informed that Mayor Everell wished to see him. This promised something, and Frankfort directed that the august official be shown to the private room.

He came without delay.

The rotund mayor could make a good appearance when he tried, and he was smooth and oily when he entered. He sat down on invitation and had something to say about the weather and the latest mining reports. He discoursed with enthusiasm of the prosperity of Glory Gulch, and prophesied a great future for the camp, which was hardly possible, when it was considered that it perched on the mountain side like an eagle's nest on a crag.

All this was preliminary, and to make himself agreeable. Presently he took a different subject.

"Warren Addison had a fairly good night," he remarked.

"Is he able to sit up yet?"

"Bless me, no! He is still a very sick man—the shock is what he suffers from. To one in his weakened condition it was terrible."

"No doubt. I would like to see him to-day."

"Impossible! Doctor Gifford says he may be able to see callers in a week or ten days, but not before."

"What does he say about the tragedy?"

"Mr. Frankfort, his life depends upon keeping him wholly quiet, and it is impossible to mention it to him. He is beginning to talk, however, and he has to-day entrusted me with an errand."

Frisco Frank saw that something was coming.

"That's a hopeful sign," he responded.

"Yesterday Warren made his will."

"So I have heard."

"Yes. The death of his brother made it necessary. That new will of course supersedes all previous ones, so he wishes to take action accordingly. He has sent me to you to request you to return to him that previous will which is now in your possession!"

It was a remarkable speech in many ways, but, chiefly, it surprised the detective greatly. He had told nobody of the will he held, and Barachias Bee had promised to be equally silent. Had Barachias proved false to his trust?

This was the natural deduction, but a trap might lurk behind the announcement.

"Why should I have his will?" demanded Frisco Frank, assuming to be surprised by the words.

"Well, as to that I don't know. Still, as you have it, the point is plain."

"To me it looks very confused."

"Not at all. You have the old will; Warren wants it; I am here to get it for him."

CHAPTER XXI.

A DEMAND FOR THE WILL.

Though the mayor's manner was mild and amiable, Frisco Frank knew that the fight was on. It was surprising that the conspirators had taken the step, but it was clear that they wanted the will and intended to have it if possible.

"Again I ask," the detective replied, "why should I have the will?"

"Again I say that point is immaterial.

It is superseded by the fact that you have it."

"How do you know that I have it?"

"Warren Addison," continued Everell, "wishes to prepare for all possible contingencies. He has a will later than the one you hold, and he desires to gather in all older ones."

"If I have what you claim I think I will hang to it."

"Since he has made a new one, yours is not worth the paper it is written on. Why do you want it?"

"If it is without value, why does he want it?"

"He wants all that is his. Until he is dead—let us hope that will not be for many years—his wills, new or old, are his private property."

"Since he has the one you say is the only legal paper he should be satisfied."

"Do you refuse to give up the one you hold?"

"I have not admitted that I hold any?"

"Yet, you do hold it. Somehow that paper was lost; I know not how. It was found by a vagrant named Barachias Bee, and by him given to you. You have it now, and Warren Addison wants it."

"He can have it on one condition."

"What is that?"

"I will give it into his own hands, but not to others."

"But he is too ill to see you."

"He was well enough to make a new will, I am told."

"You would harrow this sick man to his grave!" exclaimed Everell, his oily manner deserting him at last.

"I would do nothing of the sort. Let me go to him and have the assurance from his own lips that he wants this paper back and he can have it."

"Sir, you are unreasonable. Warren can see nobody, and we will not have him worried into his grave, I say. A man of your position in life should have some judgment."

"I think I have, and my judgment tells me that neither Warren Addison nor yourself need to worry much over a paper that you declare is utterly worthless."

"Outrageous!"

"What's the matter with this new will?" demanded Frisco Frank, pointedly. "What is its weak point? There must be one, or you would not be so anxious to get the older will into your hands."

Mayor Everell's face flushed.

"My hands, sir—mine? Why, sir, it is Warren that wants it."

"It seems to me that your sick man wants everything except the clearing up of the mystery of the murder."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"This illness of his is suspicious. He is well enough to make wills and send errands which relate only to useless papers, yet he is not well enough to help clear up the mystery of his brother's death."

"Doesn't Doctor Gifford know just what he can endure?"

"The doctor probably knows very well," answered the detective.

"Then give some heed to what he advises."

"When the doctor takes a course which meets with the requirements of law, justice and reason he will find me quick to co-operate with him. Do you expect me to do so now? I have been bullied by him, and he has drawn a revolver upon me. You know my return to Glory Gulch has not been marked by particularly pleasant events. Even you have scarcely aided to give me a good opinion of the happy family of the West Slope, and, until matters have undergone a radical change, it will be useless to ask me to play into your hands. You probably knew this when you came."

Everell rose suddenly.

"I came to test your regard for law and justice."

"Yours needs no testing."

"What do you mean?"

"Your care of Warren Addison speaks for itself."

The mayor looked critically at the speaker. He could hardly have received a more indefinite response, but presently he moved toward the door.

"I have done Warren Addison's bidding," he remarked.

With this he passed out and closed the door after him.

Frisco Frank kept his seat and calmly lighted a cigar.

"The show will now begin!" he murmured. "The gauntlet is fully thrown down. I don't know just what they had in mind in making this demand, but it looks like a bluff. They may have thought that I could be decoyed into giving up the paper, but now must see that I have it for keeps; so they will now fight me tooth and nail. Let the fun begin!"

Satisfying himself that he was free from observation, Frisco Frank took out the document he had received from Barachias Bee and read it through carefully.

"Remarkable!" he murmured. "Warren Addison was once my enemy—just after he met me by the gulch he hastened home, drew up this will and thereby gave me Misery Mine as a free bequest! Remarkable!"

The will was written in full on one side of the paper. As he turned it over almost mechanically he noted marks in pencil upon the reverse side. At first they seemed to be illegible, but close scrutiny in stronger light brought discoveries.

He read as follows:

"Have three leading men measure fully and compare with record of the claim."

It was an off-hand scrawl, and, at first, seemed wholly foreign to anything that might interest Frisco Frank, but on second reading the final words impressed him. "Record of the claim." As the detective's mind went back along the flight of years he remembered that the term meant something in the history of Glory Gulch.

The first prospectors were seven in number. By the time they were ready to stake out claims their number had been added to one-half, and fourteen men drew choice of claims, and each of the fourteen chose his land by lot and duly marked it.

Other settlers came more slowly, and the end of the year saw only twenty-three miners and a like number of claims.

Among the first lot was a man from an Eastern State, who had been an employee of a land concern in former years. He was the first of the original stakers of claims to die, and Frisco Frank never had seen him, but, ten years before the day the detective read the note on the back of the will, stories of the claim-staker's devotion to forms and ceremonies were often told.

Most of these had no interest to Frankfort now, but he recalled the fact that care was taken to make every claim valid, and so proof against all legal complications that might ensue in the future. Not only was there a full record in official quarters, but there was a duplicate in Glory Gulch when Frank lived there before.

To what should the term "record of the claim" refer if not to these old records?

"But," wondered the detective, "what claim was to be measured, and why was it to be compared with the records?"

Mechanically turning the sheet over certain words of the will were brought to his notice.

"I give and bequeath to John Frankfort, of San Francisco, all my interests and claim in the mine I now own, said mine being commonly called Misery Mine."

"Singular!" murmured Frisco Frank. "Can he have intended to measure his mining property? If so, why? And why compare it with the record of the claim?"

Still thinking, the detective recalled that he had himself once been owner of

Claim 10, so called. When he was warned out of Glory Gulch he sold the mine and it had another owner now.

Misery Mine, the possession of Warren Addison, lay directly south of this land which Frisco Frank had once operated. He recalled its olden appearance well, and any resident would tell the story that it had been a tract which none of the original claim-stakers had cared to take up. It lay unworked until after Frankfort left town, but it had since become the most paying area of land in Glory Gulch.

All this the detective now recalled, and he did not pass it by lightly, for soon he left the hotel.

First he hunted up a man who had been one of the original claim-stakers. He would surely know where the old records were. The records were wanted.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BURYING-GROUND MYSTERY.

Frisco Frank found the old settler, but did not find the records. He was told that they were in the possession of another old-timer, who was absent from town, but was expected back within a day or two. It was necessary to wait for his return, but the detective had a long conversation with the man he had called upon. They spoke much of early days, but considerably of the present.

On leaving him Frankfort went again to the hotel, and all day long he watched for Little Alf and Robert Rover. They came not, whereupon the watcher betrayed considerable annoyance. In point of fact, they were holding him back from action. There were certain things he wanted to do, and he wanted to preface action with an interview with Little Alf.

That evening Frisco Frank lay down, fully dressed, on his bed. He fell asleep, and it was past twelve o'clock when he awoke. Discovering this, he arose, sat by the window and proceeded to smoke.

The view was fine. Bright moonlight was mixed with dark shadows where the mountain peaks threw their shapes in outline. He was noticing all this when, on a distant ridge, he chanced to see a set of moving figures.

"They are like two men carrying a burden," he mused. "What can they be doing? The burden is heavy. They seem to have some trouble in managing it; they recede; they pass the summit; they disappear!"

What did it mean?

Presently he arose.

"I think I will take a walk," he murmured.

He left the hotel unobserved, and, once outside, walked off rapidly. His way was up the west slope, and then beyond the town. His face was toward the ridge where he had seen the moving men—toward the camp cemetery.

This he soon approached. The plot of ground was open fully on one side, but hemmed in by trees at the opposite extremity. He crossed the boundary line and walked on through the grounds.

Midway he came to a sudden halt, where the victim of the tragedy had been buried. A change had taken place in the immediate spot; for, instead of the orderly grave, there was a high, shapeless pile of earth, and, catching at the situation, Frank leaped forward, to make a remarkable discovery:

The grave was open and empty!

The detective betrayed excitement, but not a great degree of surprise.

Somebody had snatched the body away. The marks of the spades were still fresh, and the ghouls were probably not then a mile away, but too far for him to find the trail and pursue.

The headstone stood in place, and, as Frisco Frank noticed the inscription, he was impressed with the final line:

"I Rest Here in Sleep Forever."

"More of the fraud!" the detective muttered.

For an hour he hunted and investigated, to secure some trace or evidence that would serve as a clue, but made no dis-

covery; even their tracks had been skillfully covered or made blind.

He was retracing his steps, when he noticed another man in the cemetery. It was Barachias Bee, and Frank walked down and joined him.

"Why are you here?" demanded Frank.

"Just to see the moon."

"Do you know who did this digging?"

"Upon my word of honor I know nothing about it."

"Pard, this is a mighty queer case," he continued, seriously. "What mischief lurks back of it? Was a living man buried here instead of a dead one?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Gifford was a doctor. He might have given the buried man a drug that would have suspended the powers of life until they could come again and dig him up."

"Why should that be done?"

"Do you know enough of their plot to say it hasn't been done?"

"No, I do not."

"Then set it down as a fact that when he was buried it was intended that he should be dug up. Didn't they refuse to let anybody see the body when people gathered to witness the burial?"

"So I have been told. But there surely was a dead man. I saw him myself. If a living man was buried, where is the murdered man?"

"There are many things that are deep, and nothing is sure in this world but blue-glass specs. They are reliable at all times."

Nothing could be done; and, carefully erasing their own footprints, they returned to the town.

Frisco Frank went to his bed, and a period of rest followed, but the adventures of the night were not yet over. He awoke with the impression that an unusual sound had aroused him.

The moon had shifted around, and its light now partially radiated his room.

At first nothing was to be seen or heard, but soon there was a stir like that of a human being softly moving.

Frisco Frank reached for his revolver, and assumed an upright position.

"Halt!" he exclaimed. "Stand where you are, or I'll shoot!"

A brief lull. Then Frank saw the arm of the unknown rising.

"Stop! Hands down, or I fire!"

The hand fell.

"Now, I want to see you. Walk into the moonlight!" was the command from the bed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FRISCO FRANK GIVES WARNING.

"I'll be blamed ef I do!" was exclaimed.

"You'll be shot if you don't!" was the retort. "Come forth!"

The order was obeyed. The intruder stepped into the light and Bad Benson was revealed.

"Aha!" from Frank. "So I meet an old acquaintance! What are you doing in my room?"

"Nothin'. I made a mistake in ther room!"

"A bad mistake, very! It was not your only mistake. You came to rob me. How have you made out?"

"I tell yer I made a mistake in ther room. You ain't got nothin' I want."

"Bad Benson, did you ever tell the truth by accident?"

"See hyer, you, ef I live ter get out o' this you an' I will have a settlement—Bet yer life on that!" savagely averred the bully.

"I know your way, you big loafer! Stand by yonder wall with hands well down. Move! What, do you rebel? There, that's sensible! Now, keep still."

Frisco Frank now proceeded to look the premises over, and discoveries followed.

"What's this? An edge of the carpet turned up. Have you been putting something under—Ah!"

The detective had drawn a small bag out, and quickly loosened the string.

The moonlight showed him what was there!

"Benson, your plot has failed! A small quantity of gold-dust. Why did you put it there?"

"I didn't put it thar."

"Of course you did. Now, who ordered you to do it? Talk to the point. Tell me the name of your employer!"

"Pard, I assure you that you are wrong—"

"Don't lie. Out with the name!"

Frank stepped closer to the bully, the revolver too menacing to be misunderstood.

"I tell yer I got inter ther wrong room by mistake," he persisted.

"You never told a more transparent lie, Benson. You were to rob me of certain things, and were to leave this bag of gold-dust, the purpose being to have me accused of stealing it. Benson, I am sorely tempted to shoot you in your tracks, but shall have to let you take yourself and your miserable life away this time. Tell your masters that when they repeat this scheme I'll pin their ears to the whipping-post, sure. Now git!"

Frank tossed the bag of gold to the bad man as he spoke, and Benson slouched toward the window, stepped out on the piazza, and dropped to the earth below.

The detective looked after him thoughtfully.

"I will have the landlord shift me tomorrow. It is necessary for safety. It was a wily dodge to place dust here, but it has failed. It must not succeed later on."

The next morning Frank ate a peaceful breakfast, but it was not long before there was an outburst in the camp. The miners were not all at work when remarkable news was brought that Homer Addison's grave had been robbed and left vacant!

It was the first case of the sort in Glory Gulch, so was a new sensation.

Man-killing was common, but grave-robbing was a novelty.

Frisco Frank went along with the crowd toward the cemetery.

Doctor Gifford and Mayor Everell were among those who went, and it was clear that they were a seriously disturbed pair. For a time they had questions to ask of everybody, and the doctor mounted to a rock and made a speech in which he told the listeners that a dastardly crime had been committed. More; he wanted the grave-robbers detected and seized at once.

Sheriff Dowe came to the front, too, and he asked the citizens to turn out and help him search, but only a small party volunteered. Such as it was he finally got in motion, and the hunt was begun.

Frisco Frank, with seeming small interest in the affair, started toward the hotel, but had not gone far when he was joined by Tommy Wrenn, superintendent of Claim 47.

"Ain't you goin' ther wrong way?" Tommy asked.

"How about your own way?"

"Same as yours," returned the superintendent, with a grin. "Say, pard, I don't want ter meddle, but I noticed one thing. You kept out o' the muss, but you wasn't unseen. Doc Gifford looked at you, but not lovin'ly. Kin he suspect that you did the robbin'?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROBERT ROVER GROWS HOSTILE.

"It matters very little what Gifford suspects," replied the detective.

"Say," went on Wrenn, "I don't go no great shakes on Doc Gifford. Why is he lord duke in Warren Addison's affairs?"

"Well asked. Why do you think it is so?"

"Ther doctor may be a blessed good man," answered the superintendent, "but I don't take ter him. He has ben deep inter Warren's affairs from ther beginnin'. Et was his plan that he should go East ter get Homer."

"How do you know this?"

"I overheard him talk with Warren."

Ther latter knew he was nigh ther end o' his life, an' he wanted ter fix his affairs. He said his only heir, so fur as he knew, was his brother Homer; an' he might not be alive, as he had not heard from him fur fifteen year or sech a matter. He said he would make a will so that Homer could get his money ef he was alive, an' ef he was not, et would go ter others.

"Ther doctor argued ther point. He said et should all be done in a business way, an' the only business way was fur somebody ter go East an' investigate personally, an' he said that, as he had a bit o' business that way hisself, he would do it."

"And Warren agreed, did he?"

"Not right away. He said his brother was as good as dead ter him, an' that time had wiped out all ties between them, an' he didn't care a rap whether he proved ter be alive or not."

"Gifford carried his point, though?"

"Yes, after a good deal o' argument. He told Warren et was his duty ter look inter et, an' make sure Homer was worthy, an' that he would keep up the family honor with ther name, ef he got the money. Warren held out fer some time, an' when they separated et wasn't decided—but you have seen that Gifford did go fur Homer."

"How did you happen to overhear this talk?"

"I was nigh them. I was layin' in a cool place one evenin', an' they come along an' stopped close ter me."

"Then it is your belief that Gifford urged Warren into lettin' him go for Homer?"

"That's jest it."

Tommy could tell no more, but he had added to the stock of evidence, and when Frisco Frank parted from him it was with the strengthened conviction that there had been an evil plot hatched in Glory Gulch long before the day that Sol Jennison brought Homer into town over the line from Buckshot Bar.

After dinner the detective decided to go to the cemetery and see if there was anything new. It so happened that he did not reach that point then, however.

His course took him toward Warren Addison's house, and as he neared it chanced to observe Little Alf and Robert Rover in the street.

"Ah!" Frank murmured, "they turn toward Addison's house. Looks as if they were going to call. Yes, they knock at the door. Little Alf stands in front, and the sport backs him up like a big guard. I wonder what the association is between them? I don't believe they are old acquaintances, yet Rover takes the boy's part on all occasions. Anyhow, they are back in camn, and I will have something to say to Little Alf."

The detective had stopped, but he was watching keenly.

"Now the door opens. Ah! it is Doctor Gifford, himself, who answers the knock. I suspect there is fun ahead. Little Alf speaks—now he makes a motion to enter. Gifford blocks the way; he will not let them in. He makes a motion to retreat and close the door—now the sport comes to the front!"

Robert Rover had stepped forward, and, as the hostile manner of the party was noted, it was plain that the interview was liable to bring exciting events later on.

The sport was not more successful than Little Alf, for Gifford started to retreat, but Rover introduced his foot between door and casing.

"Wait!" he directed. "I demand that you let us see Warren Addison."

It so happened that other men had approached and now stood as auditors. These Frisco Frank joined.

"You can't see Warren Addison!" the doctor declared, in ugly mood.

"Why not?" coolly asked Robert.

"No outsider is allowed to see him; he is too sick a man."

"Gifford, isn't this farce about played out?"

"Farce, sir—farce?"

"Nobody believes the sick man is as bad off as you claim."

"I don't care a rap what they believe. I am his physician, and will protect him from idle curiosity and needless agitation."

"I want to see him on business."

"A moment ago it was this boy"—motioning to Little Alf—"who wanted to see him."

"It is still he, but I have needs in that quarter, too."

"You may as well go away; you will not see him."

Little Alf stepped impetuously forward, his face full of feeling.

"Why are you so afraid?" he cried.

"Afraid?—of you? Well, I reckon not!" sneered Gifford.

"Afraid to have the sick man seen. What secret are you hiding—what crime?"

"Crime? Beware, boy, beware!"

Gifford was trembling with anger, and his hand hovered around a pocket where a revolver might rest, but Rover made an imperious gesture.

"No threats here! Don't think that you own Glory Gulch. Even if you did, it is only a small part of the world, and there are forces that can reach you. Stand aside! Let us in!"

Once more the sport tried to pass, but Gifford drew the revolver.

"Keep away! Keep off, or I'll shoot you dead!"

"Put up that toy!" coolly directed the sport, looking his opponent full in the eyes. "I do not fear it, nor can you frighten anybody here. You show the weakness of your cause; you reveal how desperate is the crime you seek to commit. Crime, sir, crime! Do you understand? Your sick man is strong enough to do other business, but not this. Isn't that a striking affair? Is he strong enough to do other things? Has he done them, or is it all a plot on your part? Are you humbugging all of Glory Gulch as you are bluffing the town?"

It was plain talk, and it was hard for the doctor to bear. There were interested listeners.

"I will listen to you no longer!" he declared. "Both you and your ally are drunk. I'll not dally with you—"

Heedless of the revolver, Rover threw himself against the doctor, driving the doctor back, and thus passing within the house.

"I am going to see the sick man!" Robert exclaimed, but he had not reckoned on the odds. A warning cry came from Frisco Frank, and Mayor Everell rushed to the rescue.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE MEN IN HASTE.

Frisco Frank had not seen Everell soon enough to render any real help, whatever he might have been glad to do. Thus, the mayor had a clear field, and he improved it. Passing the crowd quickly, he reached the door and seized Robert Rover from behind.

"No violence!" he exclaimed.

Perhaps he did not know just what he was saying, for he proceeded to try to do violence himself. He pulled lustily at Robert's coat, and as Doctor Gifford was shoving in the same direction, the sport was forced outside the door.

The mayor seemed about to forget that he was an officer of law, and he raised his arm with the very plain intention of dealing a blow, but Robert shook himself loose and drew a revolver.

"Gentlemen, that will do!" he announced. "If there is more trouble here it will be with shooting-irons. What do you say?"

Both Gifford and Everell called out together, bidding each other shoot the sport, but he answered with unfailing calmness:

"Try it, if you dare!—I have the drop!"

"The law must deal with this case!" cried Gifford. "Go for Sheriff Dowe, somebody!"

"Never mind Dowe!" interrupted Robert. "You will not arrest me."

"That's just what we will do!" declared Everell. "We have had enough of ruffianly tactics. Go for Dowe!"

"Here he is, now!" cried a bystander.

The sheriff broke through the crowd and reached the chief actors.

"What's wanted?" he demanded.

"I call upon you to arrest this man for riot and assault!" explained the mayor with emphasis.

"What! this Robert Rover?"

"Yes."

"All right; away he goes to the lock-up. Come with me!" and he reached out to touch the sport.

"I am not going!" coolly responded Robert.

"By thunder! you will find you will! Why, no man can defy me thus. I'll take you, and I will charge you with resisting arrest, too—"

"Wait a bit, sheriff!" directed Robert. "Let me explain why you will not do this. It is because good Mayor Everell will tell you not to do it. He will order that I go free."

"Never!" exclaimed the chief official of Glory Gulch, loudly.

"An error on your part. You will do as I say, and the reason is that—"

Robert leaned toward Everell and whispered a few words that were heard by nobody else. It was not a long sentence, but it seemed to be full of meaning. The bullying air of the mayor suddenly vanished. He recoiled from the sport and his expression lost all strength. Frisco Frank knew that a center shot had been made, but how it was done he could not tell.

Rover was now smiling with careless unconcern. He faced the crowd, and continued in a pleasant voice that was as striking as his severe speech of a moment before.

"Fact is," he laughed, "Mr. Everell and myself are both practical jokers. We both like a good joke—when it hits somebody else. When we get hit—well, you know that is different. Temper will bubble up for a moment, but no hard feelings are felt. Now, Everell would not think of having me arrested. Am I not right, mayor?"

There was a brief lull. The mayor was silent, but he was making an effort to collect himself. What emotions he had to overcome nobody but Rover and himself knew. Self-control came hard, but he finally found his speech.

"Some jokes are all right," he replied. "They have to be taken. Of course, there will be no arrest. Sheriff Dowe, I command you to clear the street. Such a crowd, and so much loud talk by it will do harm to the sick man. Away, miners; we cannot have you annoying Warren Addison. Sorry to be so peremptory, but so it is. Move them on, Dowe!"

The sheriff looked bewildered, but he obeyed with alacrity. He made a rush for the men, and the miners went.

Frisco Frank was not so speedy. He leaned against a rock and paid no visible attention to anybody, but, watching the conspirators keenly in a secret way, he saw the confusion expressed in Gifford's face mixed with a hostile regard for him.

The doctor resented the presence of the detective even more than that of Robert Rover.

The sport did not long harass the conspirators with his presence. Seeing that he had averted the storm, he nodded quietly to Everell.

"I'll see you again!" he remarked, calmly, and with this he walked off down the street with Little Alf close behind him.

There was no more to be seen, so Frisco Frank, too, continued his way, but he did not follow Robert and Little Alf. He had had no connection with the latest descent on the conspirators, and he was willing to avoid even the appearance of having been concerned in it.

"I am sorry," he mused, "that they made this attack. It has shown the enemy more clearly that there is a strong current setting in against them, and will make them more guarded. I can manipulate all the attacks that are necessary. I believe, however, that Little Alf and his side-partner will contrive to be dangerous from this time on."

It seemed that Robert possessed some power of controlling Everell that Frisco Frank did not have, for it was fright and nothing else that had led the mayor to drop his project of arrest; but the power, whatever it might be, was not sufficient to embolden the sport to press the demand for sight of the sick man.

That might be explained by the theory that if the conspirators allowed such a thing to happen they might as well give up everything. Robert had known when to stop.

When the detective finally returned to the hotel he sent his name to both Robert and Little Alf, asking to see them. Word came that they were not in, but he noticed that suppers were carried to their respective rooms. The explanation was not to be misunderstood.

It was nearing bedtime that evening when Frankfort happened upon Barachias Bee. The latter suggested a walk, and, though the idea at first had no attraction for the detective, he finally concluded to go.

The vendor of blue-glass spectacles was about as much in his confidence as anybody else, and he was worth humoring.

The vendor of blue-glass spectacles was about as much in his confidence as anybody else, and he was worth humoring.

They wandered off, and were soon outside the town. On an elevated point they sat down where they could see the town in the valley and the glimmer of the moon on the mountain peaks.

Barachias soon proved that he had more than idle wandering in view. He persisted that he was a genuine peddler of spectacles, but stated that he had worked Glory Gulch dry. He wanted to move on to another town, or else "have some excitement" where he was.

"Can you promise me a chance for fighting here?" he added.

"Possibly Bad Benson might accommodate you," Frisco Frank suggested.

"That ain't it. You have some sort of trouble to settle here. Can I help you? It is my mission to sell blue-glass specs to a suffering world, but if I can help you in any muss, just you say so. I am ready for the racket at any time."

Subsequent talk proved that Barachias was sincere, and he argued the point at considerable length. The detective was willing to have his aid, but he was not prepared to unfold his business, and this delayed an understanding in full.

While they talked the moon rose above the peaks and flooded the valley. Midnight was at hand, and the lights of Glory Gulch had disappeared. For a long time it might have been thought that they were the only persons astir, but, presently, Barachias broke off in a remark, and looked away sharply.

"Hallo! there goes somebody!" he exclaimed. "See him over there?"

"He is running rapidly."

"Yes, and toward the town."

"He seems to be all alone, but his legs will soon take him into company. Maybe he has run upon the Gold-Dusters, and got a scare."

"Well, we don't need to wonder over his case."

Despite this conclusion they watched until the man disappeared at the edge of the town. Then they continued their talk, but, mechanically, watched the lower ground more closely. Again it was Barachias who made a discovery.

"There's a light moving down there," he observed.

"Somebody astir with a lantern."

"Coming this way, too."

"Yes. The light rises; it moves this

way. I can see a pair of legs with it—yes, more than one. Several persons are on the move, and they advance toward us."

"All hurrying, too."

"I wonder if there is connection between them and the man we saw running down the slope? They are following the course he took."

"Maybe they are going up to the cemetery," suggested Barachias, as a joke.

"Their course, if kept up, will take them there, but it is only chance. It is not likely any more graves have been robbed, and nothing else would take anybody there at this time of night. Speak carefully! They are near us now, and the leaders of the town are only too ready to find suspicion in my slightest action."

"Five or six of them. Say, they head straight for the cemetery!"

"They are likely to branch off. I see nothing that would take them there—but they really enter the cemetery. What does it mean? I am interested in this. Let us move that way and watch."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE GRAVEYARD MYSTERY.

Frisco Frank and Barachias rose quickly and moved down the slope. The party of which notice had been taken were in the cemetery, and another striking fact soon came to the detective's notice.

"They seem to be near the grave of Homer Addison," he remarked.

"So they do, by ginger!" agreed Barachias. "What are they doing?"

"Nothing just now. They stand inactive; even the lantern does not waver. They are in a group—they seem to stand without anything to do. That does not run in the same groove with their late haste. Let us seek the shelter of the trees, and thus keep ourselves concealed. I am willing to go light."

It was easy to get to the desired cover unseen, and this was done.

"It's Homer's grave, sure enough," added Barachias.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Frisco Frank.

"What?"

"Don't you notice anything peculiar?"

"No. What is it?"

"The grave has been filled up."

"Well, well, that's so. How do you account for it?"

"As to that, it would be a simple matter were it not that I know it had been left as it was up to nightfall. Of course, men might have been sent to fill it since then, but if the filling was done openly, why have these fellows rushed here in such excitement? It looks as if—"

"Look! there come more men on the run! They dash up to those already there, and appear to be quite as much excited—"

"Do you see who leads the new-comers? Doctor Gifford is there—yes, and Everell is just back of him. Now we shall see something worth our attention. They reach the grave! Say no more! Listen!"

The great men of Glory Gulch were on the scene. They halted close to their predecessors, and Gifford broke the silence in a loud tone, that was plainly audible to the listeners among the trees.

"What is this you tell us?" demanded the doctor.

"The grave has been filled up again."

"Who did it?"

"Nobody knows."

"How was it discovered?"

"Danny Mulligan found it. He was comin' in from ther hills, an' he happened ter come this way. He noticed that the grave was filled again, so down he run ter tell of it."

"I don't see nothin' great in the grave bein' filled up," remonstrated a miner.

"But who should do it on the sly at this hour?"

"That's just the point," replied Gifford.

"There is no man in this town who was called upon by duty or anything else

to fill this empty grave, and that anybody should give the hard work, and do it at such an hour, is very strange."

"Maybe it was a joke."

"It is no joke to shovel earth."

"Where is the man who found this state of affairs?" interrupted Mayor Everell. "I want to speak with him."

The man was there, and he was questioned fully. He told his story frankly, but it was one of simplicity in all particulars. He had seen nobody around the place, but, when he found the grave refilled, it had rather frightened him, and he ran to tell of the peculiar condition of affairs. He knew nothing more about it.

"Maybe the Gold-Dusters did it ter be smart," suggested a miner.

"I cannot believe this was done with any trivial motive," interrupted Gifford.

"I agree with you," added Everell.

"But what motive could thar be?" asked another man.

"Gents," broke in a new speaker, "you know me—I'm Johnny Plum, the sexton. I'm used ter grave matters. I want ter hazard an opinion, an' it is this: Thar is a body inter that grave now!"

"What?"

"Notice how well the dirt fits. I kin estimate dirt by the spadeful, almost. I think thar is a body in thar now."

"You think the grave would not be so plump ef it was empty, eh?"

"Jest my notion. Whoever put the earth back put in more than dirt, an' et is thar now."

Gifford and Everell had been listening to this suggestion, and it had impressed them not a little. From their ambush Frisco Frank and Barachias could see that their manner was agitated. Now, the great men of Glory Gulch drew together and held a whispered conversation. When it was done the doctor suddenly ordered:

"Open that grave!"

"What for? It's all filled up."

"Never mind—open it!"

"Thar ain't no spades hyer."

"Go and get them. Away, and get all the spades that can be used simultaneously. This grave must be opened as soon as possible. Away!"

Johnny Plum and another man hastened down the slope, and then Gifford and Everell drew apart for consultation. Their manner showed that they took a serious view of the case, and this feeling was echoed by Frisco Frank in his ambush. What would follow the opening of the grave he did not know, but it did not impress him as anything less than a very serious matter.

"Keep your eyes wide open," the detective directed to Barachias. "There may be a search made of this vicinity, and if there is we must not be found. It might be done secretly, too, so watch out that nobody leaves the party on the sly."

"Pard, what are they going to find?"

"Ask me something easier."

Frisco Frank leaned against a tree and watched the group. It was an impressive scene. One of the number still held the lantern, but, thus far, it was useless. The moon was soaring brilliantly in the eastern sky, and its light fell fully upon the cemetery and the human figures.

It was a picturesque scene, but nobody was in a romantic mood, and it all went for nothing.

After a time the men returned with the spades, and then the digging began without delay. Johnny Plum and one assistant took this upon themselves, and all of their associates stood by and watched. If Frisco Frank was not so near, he was not less interested.

Again Gifford and Everell walked apart and whispered. For awhile the detective was afraid they might abandon the work, but their curiosity, and, perhaps, nervous suspense, was enough to prevent that. The digging went on.

John Plum and his aid began to sink into the earth gradually, and on one side a pile of disturbed dirt gathered.

It was opposite to the trees; it did not shut off the view of the watchers.

Lower and lower went the diggers, and then the real interest approached. In a short time it would be known what was at the bottom of the pit.

There were no more whispered conversations. All of the regular party gathered close to the rim of the excavation, and peered down, as if to anticipate the revelation of the spades.

In his ambush Frisco Frank leaned forward as far as possible, and almost held his breath in his anxiety.

Ten minutes passed, and the detective resolved on a rash step. If the others wanted to see for themselves, so did he. He left cover, heedless of Barachias Bee's warnings, and softly joined the group. Maintaining utter silence, he peered over the shoulders of the other men and awaited the decisive moment.

Johnny Plum turned a begrimed face upward.

"My spade touches something," he announced, not without nervousness.

"Keep it up!" answered Gifford, in a tense voice.

"I reckon it's the—"

Plum ceased to speak, and, bending, wielded his spade with new care. Only a few more motions had been made when he again looked up.

"The coffin is here!" he announced.

It was a remarkable discovery, for the coffin had vanished when the body went out of sight. The coffin was back—what more would be found?

Johnny had uncovered a part of the exterior. He proceeded to complete the work, and, presently, the whole top of the box was revealed. His statement was proven true.

"What now?" he asked.

"Can you raise the front part of the lid?" asked Gifford.

"Yes."

"Do it!"

Johnny inserted the edge of his spade and pried for a moment. It was sufficient, and the lid was raised, as desired. He cast it back fully. A succession of cries came from the group above.

"There's a body in it!"

"A man is there!"

"Who is it?"

"'Tis Homer Addison!"

"No! It is somebody else!"

"Out of the way!"

Pownall Gifford pushed his companions to one side, and then leaped down beside Johnny Plum.

"The lantern!" he commanded, imperiously.

The light was handed to him, and he cast its rays fully upon the still face in the coffin. Every one of the party was keenly alert and interested, and they leaned forward over the pit. A cry rose in chorus:

"It is Homer Addison!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

FRISCO FRANK GETS A CHANCE.

The key in which these cries arose would have impressed a stranger with the belief that something remarkable was indicated thereby, for the voices were full of import. In point of fact, the men were simply astounded by the discovery.

A period of silence followed, and then deep sighs rose, and the bent heads were raised.

"What in the world does it mean?" demanded one man.

"This is a nightmare," suggested another. "Homer Addison can't be back. Why should it be so?"

"That's his body," stubbornly declared another.

"How should you know? You never seen it."

"I kin tell, because he looks so much like Warren Addison."

"So kin I. Besides, didn't I see him at the hotel when he come inter camp?"

"Doctor Gifford is the one ter settle this. Doc, who is he?"

Gifford had been staring hard at the body while the miners talked. Now he

raised a singularly pale face toward the white moon.

"It is Homer Addison!" he huskily replied.

"Back!" muttered Everell. "Back again!"

Frisco Frank was taking heed of the pair. He was studying their expressions with intense closeness, and he could have but one opinion. They were surprised and frightened by the discovery.

"Why in thunder should ther grave-robbers bring him back?" demanded Johnny Plum, explosively.

Profound silence followed the question. If it had been hard to guess why the grave had been robbed, it was far more difficult to understand why it had been refilled with its human tenant. It was thus that silence fell upon the group, and many seconds passed in utter inactivity.

"He couldn't have come back hisself," muttered Johnny Plum, anon, pointing to the body.

The remark broke the lull, and then everybody had something to say—all but those who had the deepest reasons for being interested. Gifford and Everell looked at each other, but they had nothing to say until they were appealed to directly.

"Say, doctor," finally questioned a miner, "what in thunder do ye make o' this, anyhow?"

"I don't know."

"It ain't no easy job ter dig graves. Now, why should anybody do the diggin' twice, and steal ther body only ter bring et back?"

"It is useless to speculate. I know nothing about it."

"I have a theory!" exclaimed Everell, eagerly.

"What?"

"It has all been done by a crazy man."

To Frisco Frank it was plain enough that the mayor was grasping at a theory that would turn suspicion away into a new channel, and the quickness with which Gifford caught at the idea showed how glad he was to have a theory thus advanced.

"That's right!" he agreed, with emphasis. "You must be right, Mr. Mayor. It can be nothing else. A crazy man has done all this."

It was a suggestion plausible enough to merit credence from almost any one not acquainted with any part of the inner history of the case, and it relieved the miners not a little. Most of them joined in expressing their own belief in the possibility, but Johnny Plum drily remarked:

"Ef that is so he is a mighty good housekeeper. This work has been done as wal as I could do it. Re-mark-a-ble crazy man, I say!"

The gravedigger was recorded as a skeptic, but he had few followers. The miners wanted a theory, and they took the only one open to them, just then. It must have been done by a crazy man, they decided.

Frisco Frank had been favored by the intense interest of his companions, but he knew he could not long avoid discovery if he remained there. He took his way quietly toward the trees, and reached that cover without being seen.

Considerable talk ensued, but there was only one thing more to be done. For the third time the earth was shoveled in over the body, and Johnny Plum smoothed it down with care.

Gifford and Everell had recovered a degree of their composure, and they directed everybody to accompany them back to town. One man offered to stand as guard, but they decided that it was not necessary.

There was not much danger of another robbery.

After a vain search for footprints that might betray the robbers, the party walked off down the hill. Then, and then only, Barachias Bee broke a long silence.

"What do you make of it?" he asked, slowly.

"It is a deep mystery," Frisco Frank replied.

"Ain't you any suspicions?"

"I have seen no more than you. I had no part in it, and nobody has given me any clew."

"All right. I have a notion you could do some tall guessing, but I won't pry into your business. I stick to my own line. I have blue-glass specks to sell, and they are superb. Made under my own supervision when I was at my home factory. The blind see and the deaf hear. All ills succumb to the potent charms of the specks, and California will be a new land when every man, woman, and child have my specks on the bridge of their nose—their noses, I mean."

Barachias became aware that he was talking to himself only. The detective was absorbed in thought, so the vendor ceased to be heard.

They had seen all that was to be observed, and they did not linger much longer on the high land. They retraced their steps, and Frisco Frank went at once to his hotel.

He had new food for thought, and he gave it ample play before he slept. The murdered man's body was back in its grave. Why? Who had brought it? What end had been served by stealing it and then returning the remains?

If Frisco Frank had suspicions he did not put them into words, and he fell asleep with the mystery on his mind.

In the morning, when he went to breakfast, he found Little Alf already there. The slight youth seemed in better spirits than usual, for he was calm and firm, but there was a shadow still on his face that told of troubles that worried him.

The detective kept away from him in the eating room, but he was determined to have the interview that the boy had avoided the day before. He watched him secretly, and, when he saw him leave the hotel, fell in behind and followed him at a safe distance.

Little Alf took to the hills, and then, when the town was left behind, Frisco Frank hastened on and overtook him. His footsteps evidently startled the youth, who turned nervously when the detective came up.

"Out for a walk?" cheerfully asked Frankfort.

"No," replied the boy, and then he added, slowly, "yes."

The detective did not heed the contradiction.

"How," he inquired, "are you coming on with your business at Glory Gulch?"

"Very well," eagerly answered Little Alf. "I am going to take up a claim."

"Indeed!"

"That is why I am here."

"Then you are a miner?"

"Why, of course. Everybody is here, you know. I," added the youth, with a slight swagger, "am a knight of the pick and spade."

"Where have you used them most?" drily asked Frisco Frank.

"In river-bed, gulch, and—"

"Graveyards?"

The detective broke in with the question; he could not help it. The suggestion seemed to fit like a coat. To Little Alf it was a troublesome inquiry. He lost his appearance of manliness and changed color. He tried to speak, and finally succeeded.

"Absurd!" he exclaimed. "You jest with me."

"We should go straight to melancholy in this world without jests. Life is a mighty serious affair, but jokes tone down the severity of it and make us feel younger. Dropping idle banter, Little Alf, let me say I have wished to see you on business."

"Have you a mine to sell?"

"I regret to say I have not. I never owned but one mine, and I sold that years ago. Little Alf, I have seen considerable of you. I saw you first at Buzz-Saw Valley, when you were bargaining for a horse. I saw you next on the Stone-Bruise Trail, and I've seen you at

this camp. You are a man with a purpose."

The slight youth moved uneasily, and looked at the slope as if he wished help would come for him.

"I am a practical miner!" he repeated, with dignity.

"Let us take that for granted, and come to other things. What do you know of Homer Addison?"

It was a blunt question. The speaker had intended it should be so, and he was hardly surprised at its effects. Little Alf fell back with a cry of deep emotion, and his face expressed dismay and consternation. He seemed to shrink away, as if he would make himself invisible, and he had nothing to say.

"Don't misunderstand me," continued Frisco Frank, after a pause. "I have no wish to injure you, directly or indirectly. I assure you that I am your friend. You and I, however, may be able to help each other. Regard me as a friend, and act accordingly."

"You—you talk wildly!" gasped Little Alf. "I must leave you."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LITTLE ALF AT BAY.

"Wait a bit!" urged Frisco Frank, kindly. "Remember that you are with a friend. I repeat, we may help each other. What do you know of the man who came on the stage from Buckshot Bar and met with such a calamity?"

"Nothing!" persisted Little Alf.

"Wrong! You know much."

"I never heard of this Homer Addison until all these things were announced, nor do I know more now. I am a stranger here; a stranger to all concerned. I can tell you nothing—I know as little."

"Pardon me, but you came to Glory Gulch because of that other journeyer to this land of the Sierras."

"Sir?" exclaimed Little Alf, assuming indignation.

"I venture to say that if you had secured a horse at Buzz-Saw when first you essayed to do so, this killing would have resulted differently. You tried to get here before the stage, and missed it by a hair. What did you know of the man you tried to save?"

"I tried to save nobody!" sharply replied the slight youth. "Do you doubt my word?"

"Greatly! Don't you know me, Little Alf? I am a detective. Do you think I would be against you? No! I am with you, and anxious to help you. You are fighting against odds here—is my aid to be scorned?"

"I only say you are in error," replied the youth, more mildly.

"I wish you to say more. My knowledge of the man who came on the stage begins here—yours ends here, perhaps. You and I both know that a crime has been done here—more than the crime about which Glory Gulch talks. We know an infamous plot was hatched here and carried on as far as possible. We want to stop it. Can't we work together in the matter?"

"Why do you say I know this?"

"Haven't I seen you frequently? Your mad haste to get to this town; your frantic visits to Addison's house from time to time—all tell a plain story."

"Nonsense!"

"And then—the grave robbery!"

"The grave robbery?"

"Exactly! Why did you take that body out and then return it?"

"I did nothing of the sort."

"Little Alf, your handiwork is as plain as the peaks of the Sierras. Will you explain your knowledge of the man who came on the stage?"

"I know nothing of him."

"This is folly, but you shall have your own way. I'll waste no more words on you. But do you know what forces you are beating our wings against? Do you know the power of Doctor Gifford and Mayor Everell? They are clearly the leading men of Glory Gulch. When they will a thing it is done. Even the

help of Robert Rover will not avail anything in a battle against them. With my aid you will have the strong arm of the law with you. Refuse it, and ruin will come to you. Gifford will drag you into a pit whence you will call in vain for my aid—it will be too late for help, too late for repentance, too late to save yourself!"

It was a strong warning, and rendered all the more so by the manner of the detective. He put all of his pathos into his presentation of the case. Then, when he was done, he paused and let the warning revolve in the youth's mind.

Little Alf was shaken, but he showed no signs of speaking in a way that would be to Frisco Frank's taste. Fear was present, but not an inclination to part with his secrets. Finally he broke the silence.

"All this would be worthy of serious consideration if the facts were as you claim—"

"Do you deny that they are?"

"Yes."

"Enough!" sternly exclaimed Frankfort. "Go on in your chosen way; go on to defeat, ruin, and death!"

He turned away and walked off swiftly. When he had gone a few yards he slackened his pace. He hoped there would be a call to him. There was none. He looked back. Little Alf was looking, not at him, but up the ridge. Even as the detective watched him he turned and climbed on upward.

"Beaten!" muttered the man of the law. "He disdains my help, and we must each play a lone hand—or is there hope in seeing Robert Rover? The sport is cool and logical. I could not work upon his fears, for he has none, but possibly he might be open to reason. I think the youth is going to meet him now, but I will not take the trouble to watch. Back to Glory Gulch!"

With this he retraced his steps, and was soon at the hotel again.

One of the first persons he saw there was the old settler who was said to have charge of the early records of claims, and Frisco Frank lost no time in accosting him. The old resident was more friendly than the average Gulchite had proved, and he received the detective accordingly.

It was only after a conversation of some length of time that Frisco Frank expressed a desire to see the records, and then he did it in a careless manner.

He was soon walking toward the old settler's house.

"I wish we might have you back with us again," remarked the guide, earnestly. "You ought to be rich now. Why not locate here and take up a claim, or buy somebody out?"

"I might get warned out again."

"Your career has put an end to that nonsense of the past, and you would be received gladly, I know. I am pleased that you think enough of Glory Gulch to look at the old records, though I don't exactly know what you wish to find."

"Nor do I."

"How is that?"

Frisco Frank could not tell of the vague experience that had made him wish to examine the records, but the fact had been established that his companion felt warmly toward him, and that was encouraging.

The penciled note on the back of Warren Addison's will had read thus: "Have three leading men measure carefully and compare with record of the claim." There was still the old doubt as to what claim was meant, but it was most likely that it referred to Misery Mine, the rich possession of Addison himself, so it was this record that was looked at first of all.

Specifically, it bore the number, 41, in the book, though universally known as Misery Mine. They read the record through carefully.

"Well, I see nothing unusual in that," observed the old settler.

"Neither do I."

"Was it this that brought you here?"

"Well, I might look at more, but—I want to read this again."

It was done, and, when he leaned back with a dissatisfied expression, the old settler spoke, with the air of one to whom light had just come.

"I reckon your interest is that Misery Mine adjoins your old Claim 10 on the south."

"Considering how well Misery Mine had paid Addison, it is strange that the land lay so long unclaimed. It is hemmed in by 10, 11, and 9, yet it was so long in being claimed that it bears the number 41. Of course, it was regarded as worthless, yet the other claims went off among the first."

"Something has just occurred to me. You bought of Benjamin Levis, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Then you were not among the original settlers—I know that, of course, but—this never occurred to me before; but my impression is we first-nighters here claimed all the territory this side of Horse-neck Gutter."

Frisco Frank's eyes glittered suddenly. Somehow, it seemed as if this remark was in line with something that had been in the detective's mind before. Quietly he replied:

"It is very easy to forget such things. All the while that I owned Claim 10 it was said that the land between that point and Mule-Trail Run was public property, yet nobody took it up. Now, let us look at the record of my old claim."

Number 10 was easily found. The record was in a good hand and plain in all ways, and they read it through together.

"Yes," murmured the old settler, "that was Ben Levis's claim. He sold to you, and then he went and got shot—"

The speaker became silent as he noticed Frisco Frank turning over the leaves of the book rapidly. The detective seemed in haste to find something, and when he did he read again hastily.

"Ah! this is your purchase from Levis," pursued the old settler. "A deed in full, and a copy of the official record. All the lands, equipments, rights, and belongings of Claim 10, as found recorded in the book of claims—Eh?"

Frisco Frank was whirling over the leaves again, and the old settler looked on in surprise.

"Got something else of interest to look at?" he inquired. "It must be the record of your own sale when you left us—Yes, here you are. Is this curiosity, Frankfort, or do you think of buying back?"

The detective was silent for a moment; then he suddenly leaned back in his chair and ceased to read. There was a new light in his eyes.

"Mr. Gray," he spoke, "do me a favor. Read over all these transactions, and see if you discover anything peculiar."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SECRET OF MISERY MINE.

The old settler looked puzzled, but he obligingly replied:

"Just as you say, though I don't understand. Where shall I begin?"

"With the description of the original Claim 10. Here it is. Now, take this pencil and mark down its dimensions in feet and rods. Put all the figures down. Have you got them?"

"Yes."

"Now for the record when Levis sold to me," pursued Frisco Frank. "Here it is. Mark down the dimensions again."

"No figures are given. Levis simply sold to you all the land of Claim 10, as recorded in the Book of Claims."

"Then we will let that rest, as the dimensions are just the same, are they not?"

"Certainly."

"Next, my sale to my successor. Here we are again. Mark down the dimensions."

"They are given here. Down they go! Black and white tell the story, and—eh?"

"What is it, Mr. Gray?"

"The dimensions are not alike!"

"No?" quietly replied the detective, without moving.

"Decidedly not. Why, according to this, you sold only about three-fifths as much to your successor as the original claim called for. The breadth is the same, but not the length. It falls short two-fifths, or such a matter."

"The explanation is simple. When I bought of Levis, as you will see, I simply purchased Claim 10. No bounds were mentioned. We have noted that, I can't say who was the cause of it, but it was my belief, and common talk, that there was unclaimed land at the south end of my property. I never worked it, and nobody else did. It was regarded as worthless. When I sold I did not know I owned that vacant land, and merely told my successor that I owned to a big tree that grew on a cleft in the earth."

"And the deed gives him only to that tree and cleft."

"Just so. When he bought he was not content to have the paper made out as mine was, and, referring to the original claim; so we measured the land—measuring only to the tree—and it was this amount that I sold him."

"Then there was two-fifths of your claim that you did not sell."

"Just so."

"That was a queer proceeding."

"Mr. Gray, what is that two-fifths now?"

With this question Frisco Frank leaned back in his chair and looked Gray full in the face. The detective never had been calmer, but, as the full force of the inquiry dawned upon the old settler, his expression became one of amazement.

"Why, it is now Misery Mine!" he exclaimed.

"Just so."

"But—but Warren Addison?"

"What of him?"

"If you own that land, what does he own?"

"Well, what does he?"

"I should say nothing!"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

"Why, Misery Mine is your property in full!" cried Gray. "The man who took up Claim 41 took land that was not in the market as claimable land, and when he sold to Warren Addison he sold what was not his. It was yours. Addison has no mine to-day—it is yours!"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?" coolly repeated Frisco Frank.

"This is amazing."

"I am as much surprised as you, nearly, though I have had reason to believe that something was to be found here"—the detective touched the book—"that would interest me."

"Say, Misery Mine would sell for one hundred thousand dollars to-day, I do believe."

"No doubt."

"And Warren Addison has taken out a fortune."

"The barren land was not so barren, after all."

"But if Addison has taken a fortune out of your mine, whose money is it now?"

"Here is a fine point of law. Addison bought in good faith, but the law will not let him hold what he purchased without a clear title. On the other hand he worked the mine at considerable cost and labor to himself. You can see that the law would deal with all these points if the case went to court, but maybe it never will. I am disposed to be fair."

"Anyhow, you are the legal owner of his mine."

There was a good deal more to say, but Frisco Frank took pains to impress upon Gray's mind the fact that he would never do an injustice to Warren Addison, and then backed the statement up by exacting a promise that the old settler would not speak of the discovery to anybody. It was to remain a secret, as the detective expressed it, until Warren was able to deal with the matter himself, and

thus secure an equitable adjustment for all parties concerned.

When he left the old settler Frankfort returned to his hotel. Once there he took out the Warren Addison's will and gazed at one item with a smile on his face.

It was Addison's bequest of Misery Mine to John Frankfort in full.

"One mystery settled," murmured the detective. "Addison made this bequest because he well knew that he had no legal claim to his mine. It was tardy justice, and it still surprises me, considering his old hatred of me; but I am led to infer that his conscience smote him as his strength ebbed away. He said it was an act of justice. With this will to back me up I do not think I shall have trouble in holding Misery Mine—unless a later will holds. I wonder what is going on in that house of mystery where Doctor Gifford keeps watch and ward? Are my suspicions correct? If so, there is music ahead."

A knock sounded at the door, and when Frisco Frank made answer old Peter West appeared.

He hobbled forward, took Frankfort's hand, and shook it warmly.

"It's come!" he exclaimed, in a mysterious whisper.

"What?"

"The letter!"

"From the unknown?"

"Yes."

"You wrote him that you wanted more money—"

"Yes, and put it in the tree, and now I have his reply."

"Let me see it."

Peter handed over a plain sheet of paper. It was large enough for considerable writing, but what was there was very brief. It was as follows:

"Same place. Thursday night, at 11."

All this was printed out in characters like those of a child, and the care of the unknown to hide his identity was plainly visible. No betraying penmanship was left behind.

"This is to-night," remarked Frisco Frank.

"Yes."

"We will be there."

"Remember, you promised not to do anything to annoy him," anxiously reminded Peter.

"You can rely upon me to consult only your interests."

"This unknown gentleman has been a good friend to me."

"I appreciate his real worth."

"If you should get him mad it would hurt his feelings, and—and he might hurt mine, you know."

"You are still without any idea of how much you owe him?"

"I have no means of knowing the amount, but it isn't much. We can easily wipe out the amount when we get to be partners. Ah! we will make Claim 47 the richest paying property in Glory Gulch, won't we, my boy?"

"It shall pay all it is capable of."

"That means richly, sir, richly. All that is needed is more money and right management. I have been thinking maybe we had better discharge Tommy Wrenn and get a new superintendent. What do you think?"

"Tommy seems to be doing well."

"But he don't—ah!—he don't get so very much money out of the mine, you know. It is there, though. I expect every hour to hear that a rich pay-streak has been struck, with wide outcroppings. The latest work gives some signs of oxydized iron ore, and we are likely to find it carrying a splendid yield of dust. Don't you approve of a twenty-stamp mill?"

Frisco Frank sighed as the old man babbled on of his visionary hopes. Filled with scientific lore of which he had but faint knowledge of a practical sort, he could talk indefinitely, but it hurt Frankfort when he remembered that Dorothy had to share the failures, if not the hopes, of the owner of Claim 47.

If Peter was bound up in his mine he had another hobby, and he soon reached it.

"You haven't called on us yet," he reminded, anon.

"I have been busy."

"Dorothy is at home," slyly added the father.

"I hope she is well."

"Quite well, and looking splendid. She grows more beautiful each day; a charming girl, if she is my daughter. Of course I don't mention it to her, but I want you to see her soon. You can't help loving her."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MASKED MAN OF CLAIM 47.

For Dorothy's sake Frisco Frank put an end to the idle talk that was connecting her name with Peter West's dreams. The detective did not doubt that the father was every day pouring like talk into her ears, and the younger man had respect enough for her womanhood to wish to shield her from Peter's folly.

He brought the talk back to the meeting with the unknown loaner of money.

"The meeting is to take place in your mine, is it?" he asked.

"Yes. The gentleman has always refused to meet me elsewhere."

"I will be there. I'll conceal myself so I can watch and listen, but be invisible to him."

"I beg of you to keep out of sight. It would anger the gentleman very much if he knew he was under espionage."

"We will not let him know it. Trust me for that."

"Don't you think he is a very kind-hearted man to do as he has?"

"Nobody else would have done it."

"So I think."

"I hope we shall be able to reward him some day, as he deserves."

Frisco Frank did hope so, and Peter expressed the same wish, but the rewards they had in mind were not at all alike.

When a full plan for the night had been arranged the miner took his leave. The first thing Frisco Frank then did was to look to his revolvers. He reloaded them with great care.

"It would not be strange," he murmured, "if there was some shooting when the meeting takes place in the mine."

The detective was prepared for the night. While Peter had been awaiting a reply from his unknown so-called benefactor Frisco Frank had taken pains to inform himself fully on the surroundings at Claim 47. He had visited the mine and had taken heed of everything near the immediate spot where West was accustomed to see the loaner, and had selected his own hiding-place.

There was nothing more to do but to await the hour of the meeting.

Until night fell the detective occupied himself with other affairs, but all looked to one end. Since he had no official standing at Glory Gulch he had taken pains to secure such standing by other means. Having personal acquaintance with the Governor of the State he had written to him and to a well-known judge, and by each mail he was expecting to hear from them.

When he did hear he would have authority greater than anybody in the mining town could give him, and, in this way, he would be prepared to wage war on the men who closed their doors on a mystery and a tragedy.

Night fell clear and cool, but with fleecy clouds skirting the sky, and this, with the fact that the moon would not be up until after the hour of meeting, made a prospect of unusual darkness.

Frisco Frank took no chances, as he thought, and, two hours before the appointed time, he was at Claim 47.

It was never a pleasant-looking place, and on this night it was forbidding. Nowhere else around Glory Gulch did the rocks seem so rough, ragged and ugly, and they frowned darkly upon the lone explorer who sought their cover.

The mining operations at Claim 47 had been under several different superintendents, and many of them had been as lacking in real knowledge as Peter West himself. It had been said of the place that it looked as if a crazy volcano had torn its way out of captivity, and this was not far from wrong.

The entrance was unusually large, and it was a series of erratic fissures with walls of rock intervening in many cases, and the whole forming a wild medley of passages and cavities.

Frisco Frank easily found the way he had decided upon, and then gained his station without delay. The spot was not down where operations were being carried on, but comparatively near the surface, and yet it was out of sight of the better part of nature.

On one side he had a glimpse of the sky, but it was only a ribbon, and grim, shapeless and ugly rocks were all around him.

He sat down to wait, and thus two hours elapsed. During that period he heard nothing from any quarter that would indicate that anybody else was astir, and the first sound was one so bold and full that he knew Peter West had come.

The old man clambered over the rocks with muttered words that were not expressive of appreciation of the going. He finally paused not twenty feet from Frisco Frank.

"I seem to be all alone," the detective heard him observe. "Guess I'll light my pipe."

He did light it, and five minutes passed without more of incident—then other sounds followed, and a second man was to be seen clambering down the rocks. Frisco Frank drew his conclusions, but he remained as motionless as the columns of rock around him. Straight toward the smoker advanced the new-comer, and then Peter's voice rose timidly.

"Sir, I am here," he announced.

"So am I," the stranger replied.

"I got your letter."

"I feared you might forget to look for it."

"Oh! no, I remembered it."

"Your disregard of money is proverbial."

It was plain that the unknown was sarcastic, but it was hard to snub Peter West. He answered most seriously:

"Dear me, no, sir; I don't disregard it. I like it."

"Well, we are here again. What's wanted?"

Frisco Frank was listening eagerly. He had hoped to learn something from the loaner's voice, but that was out of the question. In that labyrinth of corridors all voices were alike, and all unnatural. Even West's was a husky rumble.

"I—I want some money!" faltered Peter.

"Why?"

"For the mine, sir."

"Isn't the mine to produce, not to sink money?"

"Oh! it will produce some soon. In a little while it will repay our toil richly. The croppings are promising, and all we need to do is to find the pay-streak—"

"Yes, yes, I know! Never mind about telling me of the rest. So you are still sinking my cash? How long will this continue? How much do you owe me now?"

"I don't know to a cent, sir—"

"I do!" declared the stranger. "I have it down in black and white. I have your notes for all you've borrowed, and, though it is quite a job to foot up the total amount, I am enough of a statistician to do it. It's a pretty round sum, Peter. When will you pay?"

"Just as soon as the mine gets to paying, sir. We have lately found more favorable indications in the oxydized iron ore—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Any sort of a rock is a good indication to you. New Hampshire granite would fill you with hope, and Vermont marble would arouse your

rapturous joy. The more foreign the rock the more you would believe that gold lay under it in solid ledges!"

The loaner was sarcastic to a surprising degree, and it occurred to Frisco Frank that, for some reason, he was tired of pouring cash into this unpromising hole in the ground.

Of the loaner himself, Frisco Frank could see no more than that he was dressed in dark clothes and wore a mask over his face. He evidently intended to preserve his identity as a secret, but the detective did not intend he should.

The latter moved cautiously toward the talkers.

Peter West was shocked by the last words from his heretofore ready aid, and he was silent until the masked man abruptly added:

"How much do you want now?"

"I—I think ten thousand dollars will do."

"A mere trifle—to a borrower. A loaner might have different views. Well, West, I'll hand it over on one condition."

CHAPTER XXXI.

TO BE CAST DOWN THE SHAFT.

Frisco Frank leaned forward eagerly. When the masked man began to talk of "conditions" it looked as if an explanation was not far off, and that was what was wanted. The detective was anxious to get at the truth quietly, if possible. He thought he saw hope.

"What is the condition?" hesitatingly asked West.

"You will never be able to pay my money back," proceeded the masked man.

"Oh! yes, I shall, sir; I assure you I shall. The mine will soon develop a pay-streak, for the croppings show—"

"Dream on, old man! Business is my motto, however. I hold your notes for a good round sum. I'll burn the whole infernal lot on one condition!"

"Name it, sir; name it!" cried Peter.

"I must have my pay in something else."

"What?"

"Your daughter Dorothy!"

The secret was out. The mysterious loaner had declared the purpose that rumor had ascribed to him, and with such power over old Peter West his course was one of victory as far as the miner was concerned. Peter could not refuse unless he gave up Claim 47. To him it seemed a complete surprise.

"Dorothy!" he echoed.

"Dorothy!" repeated the stranger, firmly.

"But—I don't understand."

"I want her for my wife!"

"But, but—is she willing?"

"Let her and me settle that. All I want of you is to agree. Let me see to the rest. Peter, you owe me money you never will be able to pay. Claim 47 is not worth so much as your garden. It is barren. It is the grave of what I have loaned you. Now, I want something back. Give me Dorothy and I will abandon all claim upon you—"

"And will you give me more money?" asked Peter, eagerly.

"More?"

"Yes, so I can keep on running the mine until we strike it rich?"

"Well, well, you are a persistent man. Your heart, mind, body and soul are bound up in this hole in the ground, by Jove! More money? Well, I'll be frank with you, Peter. I'll say that—"

If the sentence was finished Frisco Frank did not hear it. One moment the detective was standing with all appearances of security; the next, and he was beaten to the rock by some heavy weight that was hurled upon him without warning. He was quick of wit, and as he sprawled there on the hard surface he knew he had been attacked by men, and that they were then piling upon him.

At the same moment a peculiar sound rose from them that was like a signal.

Frisco Frank was accustomed to rough encounters, and he tried to make the best of this. He was in a serious pre-

dicament, but he put forth all of his powers and sought to throw off the weight. He writhed with the agility and strength of a young and resolute man, but the weight was not dislodged.

"Tie him!" exclaimed one of the party.

This was something to which Frankfort was greatly opposed, and he redoubled his efforts, but they were as useless as ever. In spite of all he could do his wrists were secured as directed.

"Up with him!" added the leader, sharply.

The detective was jerked to his feet.

"Finish it up!" was the further order.

Frisco Frank took a glance toward the more open region. Peter West stood there alone. The masked man was not to be seen.

The detective was hustled along. He had lost all sense of locality, and he knew only that he was being led deeper into the mine. The step was suggestive of trouble to come. Strangers would be more likely to lead him out than in. There was a meaning to the course they pursued.

A very small lantern had been uncovered, but it was held low, and the prisoner could only tell that his companions, like the unknown loaner, were masked. A suspicion flashed upon him. There was no chance in this misadventure—the loaner had been protected in his interview, and these were his friends.

Only a few minutes did they keep on; then all paused as the foremost man pulled up.

"This is the place," he announced.

"Are you sure? Isn't this a shallow place?"

"Don't I know my business? I reckon I do. I've looked this over too many times. I tell yer this is the main shaft. Thar is a clear fall o' two hundred feet, and whoever goes down, goes ter sure death!"

The words fell upon Frisco Frank's ears with marked effect.

"Shall we fling him down now?" asked a subordinate.

"When I want a thing done I'll let yer know. Hold yer yawp!"

With this the leader took the lantern and held it forward. He touched Frankfort and pointed with his free hand.

"Look, critter!" he exclaimed.

The prisoner obeyed. He saw a wide, black cavity in the earth, but the light failed to reveal any bottom.

"That," continued the leader, "is the main shaft o' this mine. It is jest two hundred feet deep. We are goin' ter throw ye down it!"

The detective looked upon the speaker in silence. One thing he knew then—the voice and the bulky frame revealed the fact that the speaker was Bad Benson. It was a discovery, but it did not seem very important if he was himself doomed to go down the shaft.

"You know, critter, what the result will be. You won't have no life nor shape left when you touch bottom. See?"

"Not so fast" exclaimed Frisco Frank. "I object to this plan of yours. What business have you to settle my affairs thus summarily?"

"The right o' might. Do yer know us? We are the Gold-Dusters."

"I have always heard them spoken of as sneaks."

"What of it?"

"It will be proved now, if you carry out this threat. You are some five men; I am one. More, I am bound. Only a coward would doom a prisoner under such conditions. Give me a chance for my life! Do you want to fight me, singly or combined? If so, cast off my bonds and it shall be so. Give me a chance! Show yourselves men of bravery."

"Critter, we don't care a rap for sentiment. We are here fer biz, an' we know how ter do it. You are goin' down that shaft, an' it means death."

"Why do you want to do this?"

"Ter git red o' you."

"Explain! Why do you want to get rid of me?"

"Say, do yer want ter talk all night?"

Think you kin put this off until Tommy Wrenn an' his crew shows up in their mornin'? It won't work. You're goin' down now—right away. Men, git ready!"

"Am I to have no show for my life?"

"Not one! Down with him, men! Heave away!"

Frisco Frank had given up hope. He did not talk to delay operations; he could not have told just why he did talk. It looked as if he must be dashed into a shapeless mass at the bottom of the shaft. It would be the end of his crusade against the masked loaner and the plotters of Glory Gulch; the end of detective work, hope, life!

He looked at the black chasm. It seemed to beckon to him—to draw him on. His senses became dulled—what did it matter, after all? At the best, life was short. This was only a little sooner. The shaft grew to look less ominous and dreadful.

Just as he was thinking thus something cold glided along his wrists. It writhed, serpent-like, and then—his bonds fell away from the wrists. A moment later and he was pulled backward sharply and a voice called out clearly:

"Come with me!"

It was a sudden change, but Frisco Frank's mind rose to meet it; long acquaintance with danger enabled him to seize upon such abrupt transitions and act with promptness.

Somebody was pulling at his sleeve, and he obeyed the direction and leaped backward. A sudden howl rose from Bad Benson.

"Look out! He's goin'!"

The detective surely was going. His guide kept his hold, and they fled at a reckless pace. Every moment Frisco Frank expected they would fall into a chasm little less dangerous than the one he had escaped, but it did not happen, and they soon adopted another course. The guide halted abruptly.

"Be quite!" he whispered. "I think we can dodge them!"

The pursuit was going on hotly, but it was not accurate. The miserable little lantern did not give enough light to avail anything to those who carried it, and they had lost sight of their prey. There was a moment of suspense, and then they passed harmlessly by.

"It is over!" calmly observed the rescuer.

"They are still near," reminded Frisco Frank.

"We could dodge ten times their number in this wide-spreading mine. We may well laugh at them, but more practical efforts will be best. While they hunt at random let's go out of the mine wholly."

"Can we do it unseen?"

"Easily! Follow me!"

"I recognize you—"

"Very likely. We can speak of it later. For now, let's give all our attention to evading them. We may have a chance encounter, and that means an exchange of lead. Here is a revolver. Now, come on."

CHAPTER XXXII.

MOVING ON THE ENEMY.

The Gold-Dusters were still to be heard shouting directions to each other. Their voices rolled heavily in echoes, but they only served to make the safety of the fugitives more assured.

The rescuer seemed to know the way well, and he led on without hesitation for several minutes. Then his voice rose quietly:

"Here is a side exit," he announced.

They emerged from the roof of rock and Frisco Frank saw the heavens above, with a few stars twinkling among the fleecy clouds. It was a grateful sight.

"Safe!" added the guide.

The detective grasped his hand.

"I owe you a life, Mr. Rover!" he exclaimed.

"Maybe I did pull you out of a bit of danger," admitted the guide.

"The Gold-Dusters had me doomed.

As far as they could control human events I was marked for death. You came, you saved me, and I am deeply grateful to you. Consider me your debtor!"

"Your words are natural, but I want no thanks. I have seen too much of wild life, and have figured too often as rescuer and rescued to heed one lone occasion. I've seen danger in the mines of every state and territory where gold is mined, and it has been a wild life I have led. Some times the lynchers have marked me as their own—and all because I have no visible means of support. Some people say that Robert Rover is the personification of all that is evil, while others find some good in him. That's life, fate, destiny. Let us say no more of this adventure from the point of thanks. I'm glad I helped you. Rather a close call, eh?"

"It was touch and go with death."

"Well, you're out of it now. Let us walk toward the town."

"Not yet. I have to see to a friend who was in the mine—"

Frisco Frank paused as another figure loomed up in the darkness only a few yards away. He recognized Peter West, and quickly called to him. The old man was startled, at first, but when he recognized Frankfort he hurried up and shook his hand warmly.

"I thought you were dead!" he exclaimed.

"Did you have trouble, too?" Frisco Frank inquired.

"Not a bit. Everybody disappeared from my sight of a sudden, and though I hunted I could not find anybody."

"What became of the masked man?"

"Hush!" whispered Peter, looking at Robert Rover, anxiously.

"Have no fear. Speak out!"

"He fled from the mine at the first alarm."

"Have you seen no more of him?"

The sport had walked off a few rods to give West all the secrecy he wished, and the latter now responded:

"Not a thing. Oh, I'm afraid he will know we played a trick on him, and if he does he will be very angry."

"Don't lose any sleep over him, Mr. West. I reckon you don't need to do it. Keep quiet, and matters will drift all right. You can see him again, and there is nothing to prove that you had a share in any plot against him."

It required considerable argument to calm Peter's perturbed spirits, but he finally yielded to persuasion in a measure, and, by the time that the vicinity of his home was reached he was more cheerful. He left Frisco Frank buoyed up by the promise that the detective would ~~blow~~ ^{blow} anew for him.

Robert Rover had kept along with them, and he and Frankfort finished their journey to the town. On the way the detective made some effort to get into confidential relations with the sport, but he was repulsed in a quiet way.

Rover was not in a confidential mood, it seemed.

Frisco Frank sought his own room and went to bed. He had failed in his campaign against the masked loaner, and the fact was developed, he believed, that the loaner was in union with the Gold-Dusters. He was confident, despite the loaner's abrupt flight, that the Dusters had been there for just the purpose they had served—to protect him from identification or other troubles.

The next day the detective waited to make sure that Peter West had gone to Claim 47 and then left the hotel on business of his own. Everything thus far done by him in connection with the case had been marked by professional coolness, but it was painfully lacking on the present occasion.

When he paused it was before West's humble cottage.

He had been expecting to knock at the door and wondering just what he was to say when it was opened, but circumstances led to a different line of conduct.

Dorothy was sitting by the window.

There was no gradual approach by which each could prepare for the meeting. On the contrary they only saw each other when but a few feet separated them. Frankfort yielded to a sudden impulse and walked, not to the door, but to the window where she sat. His words were as abrupt as his manner.

"Dorothy, may I come in?"

He asked it in a voice wholly unlike his own, and her reply was low and faint. It was one word—"Yes"—and spoken with a little agitation, but it was enough.

He turned; he went to the door; he opened it and entered.

He stood in the presence of the woman who had been so much to him before Judge Lynch drove him out of Glory Gulch.

"Dorothy," he continued. "I have come. Is there room here for me?"

"Look!" she answered, in a trembling voice. "Is there not room?"

"For me?"

"For you!"

He sat down. His emotion was abating somewhat, but it was a delicate situation, and he tried to handle it accordingly. Strangely as he had begun he drifted into subjects of trivial nature and spoke of nothing else for a long time.

This gave both a chance to regain their coolness, and it paved the way for a better understanding later on.

He remained in the house for two hours. Before he left he had mentioned the things that had brought him there. He let her know that he was aware of Peter West's troubles, and sought to learn the identity of the masked loaner.

On this point she could give no light. She knew of the loans, but not who made them. The late events in the mine showed that the loaner could not be, as Frisco Frank had at one time believed, Warren Addison. Dorothy never had believed it was he. Warren had exchanged but few words with her in the last six years; he had practically drifted out of her sight.

Frankfort had new and well-defined suspicions of the loaner's identity, and he questioned her in keeping with his belief. What he learned was not conclusive, but it was mainly in corroboration of his views.

When the detective went away there had been no allusion to private affairs as between the two parties to the interview, but he went with the understanding that he was to call again, and it was worthy of note that both he and Dorothy were in better spirits afterwards than for some time past.

When the stage rolled in from Buckshot Bar that evening it brought two letters for Frisco Frank which reached him in due time. He read them carefully and then sought Barachias Bee.

"Are you a bold man?" he asked, abruptly.

Barachias flirted the blue-glass attachments to his coat.

"With these at hand," he replied, "I am ready to confront man, beast, bird, human or unhuman!"

"Think well."

"It isn't necessary. Name your work. Is it to rob a bank, hold up a stage, or make love to a pretty girl?"

"Be serious, Barachias. If I did not think you an honest man I should have no use for you. Don't joke now. You know my business?"

"Yes, and next to selling blue glass to a suffering world it is a noble business. If men can't be cured of their ills they should be put in prison."

"You are aware that I have been rebuffed here. Neither mayor nor sheriff is inclined to give me any legal authority or consideration. I am past needing it now. I have here authority from the Governor of this State, not to mention that of a well-known judge. Thus armed, I am going to proceed to hostilities in the matter of the Addisons. I want a

posse of reliable men to aid me. Can I count upon you?"

"More than that. You can have all my specks along with you."

"Be serious."

"I am. I'll back you up with word or blow. Count me in!—I'll serve you to the end. That's solid!"

Barachias had dropped his air of levity, and Frisco Frank felt that he was to be relied upon fully.

After that the detective went about to collect more helpers. He wanted a mixture of influential citizens and good fighters, and his experience in the town had enabled him to judge as to who would serve him faithfully. When all were gathered he had seven men in his party.

After due explanation he led them toward the Addison house.

The hour was not yet so late that people in general were in bed. Lights showed in Addison's house, and they walked up to the building with a resolute manner. Frisco Frank knocked at the door.

"It will soon be settled," he remarked. "My authority is not to be disputed, but they will not yield tamely. Prepare for a fight!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SURPRISE OF THE ROOM OF SICKNESS

There was not much delay, and when the door opened the posse saw Agatha Beese before them. She had never looked more eminently respectable, and her gaze was bent upon them in a mild way that was encouraging to those who had not faced her before.

"Madam," began Frisco Frank, in a business-like way, "we wish to see Warren Addison."

"Mr. Addison, sir," Agatha replied, "is still in bed. He can see nobody in his enfeebled state."

"I think he will see us. We will make our visit as quietly as possible, and do harm to nobody."

"Doctor Gifford will notify you when the sick man is well enough to see people," she replied, serenely.

"This is not a visit of frivolity; it is one of business. We must see the sick man."

"You will have to get permission from Doctor Gifford."

"We have nothing to do with him, nor he with us. We will go in."

The detective made a motion to enter, but the housekeeper stood her ground resolutely. Frankfort almost collided with her, but she did not make way.

"You cannot enter!"

Her manner was beginning to be doggedly firm, and Frisco Frank pulled out an official-looking paper.

"Here," he added, sharply, "is a document signed by Judge Dilson. It gives me authority to enter this house and see whom I please. More, it gives me authority to arrest anybody who opposes me."

"I don't care for you or Judge What's-his-name!" retorted Agatha, defiantly. "You can't come in, and that settles it!"

She tried to close the door, but Frisco Frank promptly introduced his foot as a barrier and then pushed forward.

"It settles nothing!" he exclaimed. "We are coming in!"

The woman was shoved back, and the whole party pressed into the hall. Once Agatha looked toward a rifle that hung on the wall, but she seemed to think better of her impulse. The rifle was not taken down. Her manner, however, was hostile, and she looked as if she was more than willing to use a firearm upon the intruders.

"Is Doctor Gifford here?" inquired the detective.

"You ought to know."

"Why so?"

"If he had been you would be a dead man now!"

"Madam, you rather over-rate the prowess of the mighty doctor!" drily returned the detective. "I don't think he

was born to kill me. Where is the sick man's room?"

"I shall not tell you!"

"Just as you see fit. Barachias, take charge of this woman."

"Certainly, captain, certainly!" cried the peddler. "Mrs. Agatha, I beg leave to call your attention to a new and choice line of blue-glass specks that I have just received from Walla Walla. They are a bargain, and you will find that their use will restore your failing vision and make you see like a girl of sixteen years. Let me try on a pair—"

It was not a part of Frisco Frank's plan to humiliate the woman, and he was seeking to interrupt his too zealous aid, but Barachias was wound up to go, and he failed. Mrs. Beese, however, found a way to stop him. As he held out a pair of spectacles she hit them a sudden blow and they went rattling to the floor and broke into pieces.

One moment the peddler looked in consternation; then he raised his head with a stern expression.

"This settles it!" he declared. "Clemency is out of place here. Mystery and murder have been done and passed by forgivingly, but this—this is too much! The Governor will take heed of it. I think the minimum penalty for breaking specks like mine is twenty years."

It dawned upon Frankfort that Barachias was not the man for a guard, so another man was appointed. With the disappearance of Agatha from the scene the tense interest of the occasion returned, and it was a serious-faced party that followed the leader.

The house was not large, and, though Frisco Frank did not know where to search for the sick man, it was clear that it could not be a prolonged task to look the whole house over.

Presently a locked door was found.

"This is where Warren used to sleep," a citizen volunteered.

"Is any key visible?"

"I don't see any. Break in the door."

"Wait a bit. Here, guard, bring in the woman!"

Agatha was brought, and the detective pointed to the door.

"Where is the key?" Frisco Frank demanded.

She hesitated for a moment; then thrust her hand into a capacious pocket and produced the desired article. She tossed it to him angrily.

"Much good may it do you!" she snapped.

Silently he fitted it to the door and turned it in the lock. The bolt flew back; he swung the door wide open.

Expectation had run high, and all had pictured the sick man lying on the bed with a mass of bandages about him. What they really saw was very different.

The room was there, and so was the bed, but the latter was not occupied. Each intruder cast a quick glance around. The room was empty!

Frisco Frank turned upon Agatha with his first sign of perturbation. His voice was harsh as he demanded:

"Why do you trifle with us, woman? Where is his room?"

"Here!"

"An empty room. Where is he?"

"I don't know."

"Again your useless denials! We will find him, and then we will deal with you. Scatter, men, and locate him as quickly as possible!"

It was a willing party, and they hurried away. Some took one course and others a different one, but at the end of ten minutes they gathered again. There was perplexity in every face.

No man, sick or otherwise, had been found in the house!

The minor members looked to Frisco Frank for the taking of the next step. He confronted Agatha with a severity which had effect even on her defiant nature.

"Mrs. Beese," he demanded, "where is your patient?"

"I have none."

"Where is Warren Addison?"

"I don't know."

"The suspicion has been strong in my mind that there was a good deal of humbug about this case of sickness. I can now see that I am right. He has been spirited away. Where has he been taken?"

"As far as I know he has not been taken anywhere. I don't know where he is; I don't know anything about him."

"When was he here last?"

"Not many days ago."

"When, I say, when?"

"I will refer you to Doctor Gifford."

"You will not refer me to anybody!" exclaimed Frisco Frank. "You will answer yourself or go under arrest. I demand an answer and want it now."

"I have nothing to say, for I know nothing about it. When my patient went I don't know; I can only say he is gone. I am innocent of all connection with his case. I have served Warren Addison well, both when he was well and sick. I am willing to serve him further, but I am not his keeper. He never told me when he was going anywhere; he did not tell me when he was going to leave here. He is gone—that is all I know."

The explanation was made with evident desire to save herself from trouble, but it was so clear she was keeping something back that Frisco Frank turned to one of his aids.

"I arrest this woman. Do you take charge of her, and hold her prisoner. We are going to find our man if it takes a week!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE PURSUIT IN THE MOUNTAIN.

It was a seriously perplexed party that stood there with Frisco Frank as the central figure. They talked in eager but low tones, and the many questions received but few answers.

Admitting that the sick man was less badly hurt than Doctor Gifford had claimed, there was an inquiry that baffled all who grappled with it in words:

"Why should Warren Addison run away?"

The minor members of the party could not tell, and when they asked the detective he only responded:

"We will try to learn."

Then came a question from a grizzled miner.

"Have his enemies killed him?"

It was a possibility that worried the men of Glory Gulch. Warren Addison had been as popular as the average, and, when his long illness came upon him it excited additional sympathy. Now, it was a painful thought that he might have been made away with while Glory Gulch sat in idleness and trusted blindly to others to do their best for him—and thus deprive him of other aid.

Frisco Frank had not expected this set-back. His opinion was that Gifford and Everell had taken the sick man away without his consent, but there was a grim danger that had been suggested by the miner. Possibly violence had been done. Perhaps another murder had been committed.

The detective was making a last effort with the housekeeper when quick footsteps were heard and a man came hurrying into the room.

It was Tommy Wrenn, and his usually placid face was keyed to a high pitch.

"Say, can't yer find him?" he demanded.

"Do you mean Addison?"

"Yes. You don't find him, do yer?"

"No."

"Wal, yer won't. He's been taken off, though lands knows how et was done. Mighty queer things happen in Glory Gulch this moon."

"Who has taken him?" demanded Frisco Frank.

"I don't know."

"Was Gifford one of the party?"

"Was he? Wal, I should say not! Ther way he howled when he found out et was done didn't look like et. No!"

"Wrenn, speak quickly and to the

point. What do you know of this affair?" the detective asked, imperiously.

"Easy told. I was passin' of this point when I heerd loud voices and confusion in this very room. You know I don't like Gifford no better nor I do a goldmine, an' et come over me that thar was more mischief afoot in his miserable house. I see that the winder was raised, an' I crept up hyer an' pushed the curtain back a bit."

"What did you see?"

"Gifford, Everell and this female woman, Agatha."

"What were they doing?"

"Howlin'!" frankly replied Mr. Wrenn. "The three o' them was in consultation, though et was mostly howl. Ter b'ile et down, their sick man had disappeared."

"How?—how?"

"Jest what they wanted ter know. He had been left alone, an' when they come back the winder was open an' he was gone."

"Are you sure of this?"

"I'm sur they said so, and the scared an' mad look they had was proof that they was sincere."

"Then the sick man had fled."

"Not ef they reasoned et out right. Doc Gifford said he would swear that he hadn't the strength ter run away, an' et was doubtful ef he could stand erect."

"What was their theory?"

"That somebody had come in an' carried him off."

"Strange"

"They mentioned your name as one who might have done et, but the guess was crazy."

"Right, Tommy. I had no hand in it. Taken away from Gifford and Everell, eh? This gets interesting. What more is there?"

"They pursued."

"How did they know where to go?"

"They didn't. They started off on a blind trail, but they argued that et wasn't possible to take a sick man away very fast, an' they might overtake the other party."

"How long ago was this?"

"Less than an hour."

"Which way did the pursuers go?"

"Straight up the range. I follered after them on the sly, but they separated, an' when I took ter doggin' Gifford he run about like a madman, an' I soon give et up an' hustled back ter see you."

"Are you sure they were sincere?"

"I'll bet my last red onter et. They acted like they was scared ter death over the slip."

Wrenn's good faith was not to be questioned, and Frisco Frank determined to act in accordance with his information. If the detective had a theory as to how the sick man had disappeared he did not divulge it, but he turned quickly to his followers.

"Men," he exclaimed, "you have a known Warren Addison. I think I can rely upon you to help him when he is in trouble."

There was a general shout of approval. The citizens were with him, and they said so in unmistakable manner. Such of them as had been reluctant to doubt Gifford were now convinced, and they were eager to do their share in the work.

"Then," added Frisco Frank, in a ringing voice, "let us to the range ourselves. It is a tangled way and there is no moon, but our chances are as good as anybody else's. We may prevent a dark crime among the gulches and ridges that hem this town in. Come."

They rushed from the house, and all faced westward. There lay a wide, wild region, and it was trackless, but their zeal brooked no obstacles to their purpose. Frankfort pointed upward.

"Keep within hail of each other, but spread out as much as is safe. Now, on, on!"

There was an answering shout from the men, and with Frisco Frank and Tommy Wrenn at their head they dashed up the slope.

The detective realized full well that their chances of success were not good. With absolutely no clew to guide them the one hope that the hunted party, burdened by a man who, it was claimed, was unable to walk, would be obliged to move so slowly that they could be run down; but they had the whole wide area of wild country to use for a hiding place.

The original plan was carried out, and the searchers tried to cover all possible ground. They swarmed upward and onward, and ridges and ravines were alike seen to with all possible care. That they could make sure of anything in the darkness they well knew to be impossible, but nothing was lost by lack of zeal.

This was the story of the next two hours, and there was nothing more to tell. Nobody was found, and, finally Frisco Frank found himself with four men of his party who had been drawn together by the contraction of a wide gulch they had followed. They exchanged experiences, but one was the echo of another. There was no discovery to report.

While they stood in a group, with conversation dying out and the leader wondering what was to be done next, more men appeared close at hand. It was thought they were of their own party, and they advanced to meet them.

At the last moment Frisco Frank recognized Doctor Gifford. Quickly the detective resolved on a plan of procedure, and it was not one of hostility.

"Have you found the lost man?" he bluntly asked.

The doctor's face could not be read in the darkness, but his manner was disturbed and nervous.

"I have found nothing," he replied, huskily.

"We heard that Addison was missing, so we started to help find him."

"He has wandered away in the delirium of fever!" exclaimed Gifford.

"Was he out of his head?"

"Flighty, sir; decidedly flighty! His injuries are severe."

"Do you think he went alone?"

"It must have been so."

"But was he able to walk?"

"I had not thought it, but it proves that he was."

"Where have you looked?"

"I may say, everywhere."

"What will you do now?"

"Look everywhere again. I have no more definite plan. Excuse me, now; I must away to renew the hunt. Addison is out of his head. He must be found—I will away to do it!"

Plainly, Gifford did not want to keep Frisco Frank's company. The latter had no objection, and he let him go without a word, but, after that, two men kept near the doctor in his travels. They were directed by Frankfort to follow at all times, but to do it secretly.

The search was renewed, and there was no cessation. Hours passed, and the men grew too weary to proceed further. They must have rest, and they threw themselves on the ground where they were and sought strength for action on the morrow.

Frisco Frank aroused them at day-break.

"Come" he directed. "There is something to see below."

CHAPTER XXXV.

OPEN WARFARE.

The searchers proceeded to the top of a ridge. On the lower land, but further west, they could see a dozen men moving rapidly in an irregular line.

"Doctor Gifford and his party," Frisco Frank decided. "They do not seem to be men of Glory Gulch, which indicates that Gifford has not yet located the runaway. He is persistent, but we must beat him in the hunt. We need more men, and I must go to the camp to secure them."

This plan being approved, and, selecting a competent leader, the detective

hastened back to town, accompanied by Bee.

When they sighted the hotel, they saw Robert Rover sitting on the piazza, smoking, with complacent composure.

"Barachias!" exclaimed the detective, "I have work for you!"

"Name it, general!" replied Bee, promptly.

"Keep your eyes on Robert Rover. Where he goes do you follow. Do it secretly, but don't lose sight of him. If he goes out, run him down, if possible."

"I'll do it!"

Frisco Frank determined to enlist the most reliable men of the town, and now took this step. He interviewed certain citizens, and then sought the hotel, always a gathering place for the idle.

Rover still sat at his ease, and the detective accosted him.

"You don't seem to be engaging in the hunt, Rover," he remarked.

"The hunt for Addison? No!" answered the sport, calmly.

"Have you no interest in Addison?"

"Of course, in a measure."

"Where do you think he is?"

"Can't say. Better ask some of the searchers."

"I ask you, and I think nobody is better qualified to tell."

"How is that?"

"I believe it was you who decoyed him from Gifford's."

"Pshaw!"

"Mr. Rover, I see no reason to think you a man of evil life, and my impressions of you are favorable, but I am not blind. Where have you put the missing man? You can be frank with me; my sympathies all go the same way as yours. We work to a common purpose, and that is to defeat Gifford. Let us join hands. Where is the missing man?"

Rover was studying his companion with a serious and perplexed expression.

"Really, you surprise me, sir," he returned. "You err in all your conclusions. I have no knowledge of Addison, and I have not and shall not mix in with this quarrel."

"Rover, I am not blind. What your actual connection with the case is, I don't know—I suspect you have taken part only as an ally of Little Alf. As for the youth, I comprehend him well. I have seen through him ever since he came to Glory Gulch. I know his interest."

"My dear sir," suavely replied Robert, "why should he be interested in Addison?"

"He is not."

"I don't see your point."

"It was the man who came here that he was interested in—call him Homer Addison, or what you will. His real name—well, I confess I don't know it. Homer Addison is a lie and a fraud!"

"You seem to know this story too well to need aid," drawled the sport.

"Wrong! I don't know it as well as I wish I did. I don't know who it was that came here claiming to be Homer Addison, but I suspect he had no right to the name. Who was he? What is Little Alf's deep interest in him?"

"Really, you are too obscure for me."

"Rover, you only delay the final exposure. I have enough of an idea of this case to wind it up quickly, and I am going to do it. The little that is unknown to me now will not defeat my purpose. Get under cover while you can! Join with me and count on my friendship."

"I think I will remain neutral," with a smile.

"You will make a mistake. You have kidnapped the missing man, and I know why. I will prove all I say before long. I shall find him; I shall explain your part and that of Little Alf; I shall explain—"

Frank bent forward and whispered a few words in the sport's ear. Robert started perceptibly.

"When you want to see me," added the detective, "I shall be glad to talk. Better unite with me."

He walked off, hoping that Robert would call to him, but the hail did not come.

When he looked for the sport again he was missing. Barachias Bee was also conspicuous by his absence.

It was not hard to get the searching-party, and, within an hour, a large number moved on the hunt. Some who claimed to be good trailers were directed to make that their specialty, beginning at the Addison house, but the part of the majority was simply to make a close and persistent search in every nook by the way, and seeking for caves, known and unknown.

The women of Glory Gulch had much to occupy their time that day. They could stand in their own doors and, looking mountain-ward, see the hunters ranging over the higher points like human bloodhounds. It was nothing to observe one of them swinging, monkey-like, from a crag, or dangling over a precipice, in the effort to find some crevice which might lead to an unknown cave, and confidence kept pace with their zeal.

The women were sure they would succeed.

When the non-combatants were not watching they were quarreling. Distinct charges were out against Gifford and Everell, and there was a strong under-current against them, but they still had their adherents, and arguments were frequent and angry.

Thus the day passed. Not one of Frisco's party had returned. It looked as if a battle was being fought on the rugged hills, and where victory would rest nobody could tell.

As night fell the searchers began to come back, but on all sides the report was the same; nothing had been seen of the missing man.

Frisco Frank gathered his forces at the hotel. All had promised to make another effort on the morrow, but he had a few words to say to them, to make more certain of their adherence. His talk was not complimentary to Gifford and Everell, for he was charging them with evil plots, when there was a stir at the outskirts of the crowd, and Gifford, himself, pushed forward, pale with rage.

"I am here to speak for myself!" he cried. "Now, will you tell more lies about me?"

Frisco Frank looked calmly at his excited enemy.

"If I have made any incorrect statements, you have only to disprove them," he answered.

"I can, I will disprove them—not to you, for that I scorn to do; but my fellow-citizens shall see that you have willfully lied about me. Not one word is true. Sheriff Dowe, come here!"

The officer advanced to his superior's side.

"Arrest yonder man!" ordered Gifford, sharply.

"Upon what charge?" demanded Frankfort.

"That of kidnapping Warren Addison!"

"Nonsense!"

"I say you have done it. You and Robert Rover are leagued together, and it is all your work. I am going to put an end to this, and you will produce Addison or suffer the consequences. You have done mischief enough here, and I am going to stop it. Sheriff, delay no longer. I command you to arrest this John Frankfort!"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

FRISCO FRANK GROWS AGGRESSIVE.

The sheriff, not reluctant, moved forward, but Frank stood his ground.

"Wait a bit!" he replied, steadily. "I decline to submit to arrest, and think it foolish on your part to insist upon such a thing."

"Foolish or not, I do insist!"

"Again I say, wait! I am a detective. I have authority from both a prominent judge and the Governor of this State to

proceed in this case. Do you realize what that authority means?"

"It means nothing!" retorted Gifford. "You cannot come into this town and run it. Dowe, do your duty!"

The sheriff again started forward, but several of Frank's followers ranged themselves by his side, and it was clear that the arrest could be made only after a fight. Gifford wavered, but just then there was a commotion among the crowd. A man pushed roughly through.

"Here is somebody who ain't afraid ter act!" he cried, hotly.

It was Bad Benson! A revolver was raised in his big hand, the muzzle turned upon Frisco Frank.

Several men sprung to stop the shot, but somebody else acted with more dispatch and resolution. A report followed, and Bad Benson fell heavily to the ground, his revolver flying harmlessly away.

"That's ther only way ter deal with such cattle!" declared the man who had done the shooting.

It was Tommy Wrenn, and he composedly held the weapon with which he had laid Bad Benson low.

The event had cooled the hot blood of the crowd. The bully lay writhing feebly, and even his downfall was enough to recall angry men to their senses. He was carried away to the hotel, but no audible comment was made on his fall. The detective's partisans approved of the deed, and even Gifford was too wise to make the incident a subject of talk in his own favor. Bad Benson had been the terror of Glory Gulch, and he had no friend to do him honor when he ceased to be its bully.

Gifford's voice was more subdued, as he took up the conversation again.

"Frankfort," he asked, "will you yield to Sheriff Dowe?"

"I will not!" was curtly responded.

"Do you defy law and order?"

"No. I maintain them."

"Sheriff Dowe is supreme here."

"Not over State and courts."

"There will be a day of reckoning for this," pursued the doctor, his passions bubbling up again. "You have come into this peaceful town and stirred up contention. You shall answer for it, and your authority as a detective will not help you—the law will not excuse crime and violence committed under any mask. The law will know no favorites."

"The sooner this matter goes to a court of justice, the better it will suit me. I am willing to explain all I have done here. Is it the same with you?"

"I am more than willing!" the doctor exclaimed. "I want to see the case tried, and we all know we can prove you guilty of kidnapping Warren Addison—"

"Why should I kidnap him?"

"The reason is plain. Through some undue influence he was led to make a will that gave Misery Mine to you, but his sense returned, and he took steps to annul that crazy step of his. He made another will. It is your scheme to break up his later one, and to make the first good. You will be defeated; the later will is going to hold."

"The later one is not worth the paper it is written on!" declared Frisco Frank.

"We will see."

"That will is a lie and fraud!"

"Ridiculous!" cried Gifford, but he looked ill at ease.

"I repeat, it is a lie and fraud. Do you want that explained?"

"There is no need," hastily protested the doctor. "I know this is all idle talk. You can do nothing that you say. The later deed was witnessed by some of the best men of Glory Gulch, and they will certify that Warren Addison was of sound mind when he drew the will. More, he did it in their presence. What more can you ask for?"

"Once more, it is a lie and a fraud. Still, I have no breath to spend in attacking it now. Even if it is good, I shall still hold Misery Mine."

"Absurd!"

"That mine never was Addison's. He

bought it of a man whose title was defective, and, for that reason, the sale was not legal. Warren Addison was never the rightful owner of Misery Mine. It was my property, and mine only. I am to-day the legal possessor of the mine, and the deeds of the claim will show it!"

Gifford looked hard at the detective, but it was news to him, and it seemed so absurd that he shrugged his shoulders with the sarcastic comment:

"I will let the people judge of your full pretensions from this one sample. Men, you have heard. Will you now believe anything whatever that this fellow has said?"

"No!"

The doctor's adherents had been eager to use their voices. There had been no chance before, but it appeared to have come, and they really made the monosyllable ring out with force.

Old Settler Gray moved forward between the rival parties.

"I am too far along in years to fight for anybody," he mildly observed, "but I can speak a word to the point here. Frisco Frank tells the truth about the mine. You know I hold all the records. I have been over them with him, and I can assert that he is right. He is the legal owner of Misery Mine. All other titles are defective. His claim is not to be disputed."

"It is a lie!" insisted Gifford, hotly. "All this is a scheme to wrong a sick and suffering man. It shall not succeed. I am not a miner, myself, but—"

"You know something about gold-dust, don't you?" interrupted the detective.

"I do, and—"

"Your knowledge is peculiar!" drily added Frisco Frank. "Since you are disposed to make so much talk over this, I will say something more to let people see what you are. Men of Glory Gulch, look upon the secret chief of the Gold-Dusters!"

The doctor stepped backward abruptly, but there was utter silence until Frankfort again spoke.

"For a long time this town has been worried by a gang of sneak-thieves, men who stole dust from mines and miners alike, and also acted as petty highwaymen. They cared not whence their gain came, so long as it was safe, though they were too cowardly to be road-agents. You know them well, but you have not known their chief. Look at him now—his name is Pownall Gifford!"

"It is false, false!"

"I can prove it all. Do you think I have been alone in this camp with so many foes around me? No! I sent for fellow detectives, and, though they have but lately arrived, they have done good service. Gifford, this morning you were hunting in the mountains for the missing man with a party of strangers as your aids. These men have been tracked to their lair—they were the Gold-Dusters, and those who tracked them know their mysterious leader. Look upon him now!"

He pointed to the doctor, but, before the latter could rally from the shock, there was a cry from the outskirts of the crowd.

"Look! Look up the mountain! What does all that mean? Somethin' is goin' on thar. What is it? Look, look!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHO WAS THE WOUNDED MAN.

The outcry of the miner turned all eyes to the point indicated.

On the mountain-side lights were visible. They were large, bright, and flaming redly, and moved from point to point like writhing serpents.

"Torches!" exclaimed an observer—a party of men coming down the mountain.

"They are at a rough place. See! they crook and turn, and move slowly and carefully. Who is it that needs to carry lights on the Giant's Hump, anyhow?"

While these speculations were being

considered, the lights disappeared, one by one, as their carriers reached a ravine, and so were concealed by an intervening ridge.

Gifford was uneasy; but Frankfort, determined that he should not leave the group, pressed his charges so hotly upon him that the doctor had all he could do to defend himself.

The light reappeared, and this time in the town itself. Marching through the streets came a body of men, heading for the hotel. Their torches blazed less vividly, but they made a picturesque appearance.

"There are over twenty men," muttered a miner. "They walk in a solid group, and are carrying something."

At that announcement the doctor made a move as if to slip away, but, at a motion from the detective, the citizens presented a compact front, and left no chance.

The torch-bearers now having reached the spot, spread out and revealed a litter in their midst, with a man lying upon it.

One of their number, a stranger to the citizens, advanced toward Frisco Frank and saluted.

"I have done your bidding, chief!" he spoke. "The missing man is here!"

"Warren Addison!" was the general shout.

They would have surged forward to the litter, but the bearers ordered them back.

"Place the litter on the piazza," directed the detective.

He was obeyed, and, as they set the structure down, Little Alf bounded out of the encompassing group, and threw himself upon the man who lay on the litter.

"They shall not harm you!" the slight youth cried. "I will defend you as long as life remains within me!"

"Be calm!" commanded Frank. "Nobody is to be hurt here. Men of Glory Gulch, here is your missing man! Do you recognize him?"

Gifford, forcing his way toward the litter, now cried out sharply:

"I protest against any theatrical performances now. I am a physician, and I can tell as nobody else can what is best to do. I say that undue excitement will prove fatal to Warren Addison."

"Pah! There is no such man here!" shouted Frisco Frank.

"Here," pursued Gifford, excitedly, "do not be cruel, men. Make way, and let our fellow-citizen be carried back to his own room. Bear in mind that he has long been one of us; don't take away the little life he has left in his wounded body."

Frisco Frank, watching the man on the litter keenly, knew that he was not in imminent danger of death. His head was bandaged, and through the imperfect coverings it could be seen that hair and mustache were singed away as a result of the explosion, but his manner was not that of a man in dire extremity.

The detective shoved his way to Gifford's side.

"Doctor," he demanded, "who do you say this is?"

"Everybody knows it is Warren Addison."

"I say it is not. He is no more Warren Addison than I am. Men of Glory Gulch, there has been a base fraud here, but the truth is coming now. I assert that this is not Addison, but a base counterfeit!"

"Let him speak for himself!" cried the doctor, shrilly. "Speak, Warren Addison! Speak and proclaim your rights against this flagrant attack of a man who would rob you of money, character, and life!"

The wounded man lifted a bandaged arm.

"I will speak," he replied, in a voice of unexpected power. "This man is right—I am not Warren Addison!"

The doctor fell back, with a deeper pallor coming to his now ghastly face.

"He is not Warren Addison. He is the

man who came on the stage the night of the murder," explained the detective.

"Homer Addison!" cried a miner.

"No! Nor yet Homer Addison! Let him tell who he is. Speak, man! Who are you?"

Little Alf lifted his head from the wounded man's breast.

"No, no!" was his wild cry. "Do not speak! Do not say anything. Be silent—be silent forever!"

Frisco Frank touched the slight youth with a kind hand.

"Be composed," he directed, soothingly. "For your sake we will forgive much to him. We will pardon him if we can. Rise, girl!"

"Girl?" echoed the bystanders, wonderingly.

"Men, have you all been so blind?" cried the detective. "Have you not seen through this frail disguise? The slight form, the girlish ways, the voice—I have long suspected the truth. I know not the name of this young lady, but I soon penetrated her disguise; I knew that Little Alf was a woman!"

A murmur of astonishment ran through the crowd.

"You must see it all now," Frank added. "You have noticed her devotion to this man from the very night he came on the stage. Is it not clear that she loves him?—that she followed him here because of that devotion?—that all of her later acts are thus to be explained?"

The wounded man lifted his hand again, calling for attention.

"Promise me," he requested, "that no harm shall come to this girl because of her connection with my affairs."

"I promise that," the detective answered.

"Then hear the truth! My name is Roscoe Barclay. I am a man not unknown to the courts in the East. I have served my time in prison for forgery, and I have lived by my wits. Just now there is nothing for which the law can touch me but this affair in your town."

"Tell us the truth about that," commanded Frank.

Again Gifford pressed to the front. His whole appearance showed that he knew he was near the end of his career, but he was bound to fight to the end.

"I protest," he cried, "against this deranged man being led on to testify falsely against himself. We all know he is Warren Addison. He is crazed with his wounds now. Didn't I tell you that when he fled to the mountains? He is burning up with fever, and he is not responsible for his own words. Look upon him! You have known him long. Is he not Warren Addison?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted the doctor's adherents, loudly.

"See his hair, eyes, form. I say he is Warren Addison."

"Of course he is!" thundered the adherents. "It is absurd to say different. Let us protect Warren Addison from his foes!"

"Stop!" commanded the wounded man. "I speak for myself in this case. I am the man who came on the stage, and you all said I looked like Warren Addison. I may look like him, but I am not he. I am, just as I have said, Roscoe Barclay—no one else."

Gifford had been making efforts to interrupt, but Frisco Frank now interfered, and by his orders the doctor was secured and bound.

Word now came that Bad Benson's life was ebbing away, and that he had a statement to make. There was not much interest in the ruffian, but the call was heeded, and his confession was soon made.

He admitted that he was a member of the Gold-Duster gang, and told the whole secret of the band.

Pownall Gifford had been the organizer and captain of the band from the start, and that explained why he was always well supplied with money, even if his professional practice was small.

He never worked with the men on

their plundering trips, but all were planned by him. He rarely saw them, but communicated by cipher with one of the party, who acted as lieutenant, these ciphers being left at a given point.

Benson had acted as a sort of agent and informer in the town, aiding to discover chances of plunder, and helping all he could.

Other things the dying desperado told, and when all was done the listeners hastened back to the impostor. It was his story—the account of the plot against Warren Addison, that was wanted most.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE STORY OF THE CONSPIRACY.

Roscoe Barclay had been made comfortable in a room of the hotel, and when Frisco Frank and the others came to his bedside he related his story in these words:

"I have explained who I am, and how I have lived. I will speak to the point now. Three years ago I met Doctor Pownall Gifford in Chicago. I did some work for him that need not be told; it was not creditable to him or me. At that time he mentioned that I looked enough like a certain Warren Addison, of this town, to be his brother.

"I never saw him again until a few weeks ago. Then he came East, hunted me up, and unfolded a scheme to me. He said Warren Addison was dying, and had a pile of money to leave to his heir, a brother by the name of Homer. Gifford had been sent to find that brother, but, instead, he had come to me. He proposed that I palm myself off as the brother, and scoop in the fortune.

"I objected that Warren would know that I was not his brother. To this Gifford replied that he knew enough of medicine to be able to say that Warren would die before we got here, so all I had to do was to accept the money. My resemblance to Warren would satisfy people here.

"I know now that it was the plot for a confederate to give Warren a poisoned drink before we arrived, and thus remove him. That was not told to me by Gifford.

"Now, I am not going to seek to excuse my acts. I cannot. All I have to say is that I agreed to the scheme.

"We arrived here by stage, as you know. I was to show myself at once at the hotel, to let people see how much I looked like Warren. It was done; then we went to the house.

"Affairs had not gone well there. The confederate had mixed the draught that was to remove Warren. It was said that he drank it, but, if he did, the drink failed to act. He was still alive.

"Gifford's aid, however, thought he was dead. Warren had fallen asleep on the bed. It was a natural sleep, but the confederate mistook it for death.

"We three were in an outer room, congratulating ourselves on the success of our plans, when Warren appeared at the door which led to his room. I shudder to tell what happened then. Gifford chanced to be standing near the door. He was amazed, but he acted with decision. He had a knife; he struck, and Warren Addison fell dead!

"Shortly after the explosion occurred. Warren kept a keg of powder there, and a spark somehow fell into it. I was severely burned—almost fatally.

"Now, the scheme for me to pass myself off, not as Homer Addison, but as Warren, was a sudden thought. Only a couple of hours before Warren had called in men and made a will. The confederate—and this was Mayor Everell, as you can guess—knew of this will, and that it gave Misery Mine to John Frankfort.

"When he believed Warren dead he had hunted for the will. It was nowhere to be found. You will see what the situation was. With this will in existence it would be of but little gain to us to pass me off as Homer Addison. The will gave Misery Mine to somebody else, and the chief part of what we had schemed for would be lost to us.

"In this fix Gifford caught at a new plan. It was that I should assume the identity, not of Homer, but of Warren Addison, and that, to keep the plot from being penetrated by those who knew Warren well, the doctor should forbid any one to see me, claiming that I was too much injured to see any one. In due time I was to make another will, and thus the first one would become of no value.

"This plan was carried out. I was put to bed, and admittance was denied to all. Really, I was severely injured, and I needed that privacy for awhile. You can see my wounds even now.

"In due time I, as Warren Addison, made a will. I need scarcely say that Gifford and Everell got the lion's share.

"As I lay on my bed, burned, bruised, and ill, I slowly improved in body, but my mind was not easy. It occurred to me that I had put myself in great personal peril. At the start I was to share with the other conspirators. It was still said that I was to do so, but I then realized that I was no longer of use to them, and that their interests demanded I should die, as Warren Addison had died. I became frightened, and my life was a living death in those days.

"Danger is a quickener of the human conscience. I resolved that if I lived to get clear of their clutches, I would confess the whole plot. As my strength came back I resorted to subterfuge. I determined not to let them see my gain, but to wait until I had enough strength to escape from the window and get among honest men.

"Such was the idea I still fostered when, the evening of my disappearance, Robert Rover and Little Alf came to my rescue. They had other men along, and the combined force took me from the window and carried me off on a litter to a cave.

"I had not known, before, that Little Alf was near. I will still call this faithful woman by that name. She has known me long, and loved me more than I deserved. I had deserted her when I came here, but she was quickly on the trail, and, though she was not able to follow direct, we took time so easily that she arrived here as soon as I.

"Experiment proved that I could stand, and even walk a little, but I have been shaken up by late events, and I am far from strong yet. It was the intention of my rescuers to keep me out of sight in the mountains, but Robert Rover was dogged to the cave by one Barachias Bee and a detective, and they brought a larger party and seized me; so I am here.

"I have confessed the conspiracy in full. I can justly ask no mercy of you, but one thing I do ask earnestly. This woman—she who has loved me and clung to me when I was unworthy—I beg that you will be kind to her."

Little Alf had been lying with her face buried in the pillow that held Roscoe Barclay's head, but she now sprang up, suddenly.

"No, no!" she cried, excitedly. "I will not accept any mercy that does not include him. Listen, men! He has been redeemed by my devotion. He swears that if we see liberty again he will be true to me and lead an honest life."

"It was a sincere pledge," added the wounded man, "but Marcia, do not repeat it here. Such pledges do not count in law. Leave me to the punishment they think meet for me."

The girl flung herself at Frisco Frank's feet.

"Mercy!" she exclaimed, in a voice full of pathos. "Mercy for him—and me! It will kill me if you punish him!"

The detective raised her gently.

"Be at peace!" he returned. "I make no promises now, but, here in the mines, justice is not blind. It may be this man will be saved by a woman's love. Wait!"

Frisco Frank turned to the other persons present.

"Some of you," he added, "did not

hear Bad Benson's confession. From him we know that Doctor Gifford was the mysterious person who has been loaning money to Peter West, with the intention of compelling the old man to persuade Dorothy to marry him to pay the debt. I have suspected this since I learned that the loaner was not Warren Addison. We know, too, that Claim 47 has not been such a dead loss as was supposed.

"Gifford and his Gold-Dusters have been robbing the mine at night, but doing it so secretly that their work was not discovered. It is likely that Gifford has got back every cent he has put into the mine, so Mr. West owes him nothing.

"Warren Addison abandoned his hopes of winning Dorothy years ago. He died by violence, and was not the worst man that ever lived. I cannot doubt that he willed Misery Mine to me as an act of justice, but my claim upon it made it unnecessary.

"As to the will itself, I can say nothing definite. The chances are that it was blown from his window by accident, to where it was found by Barachias Bee.

"As for the rest of Warren Addison's estate, it goes to his brother, if he can be found. Possibly that will be impossible."

Robert Rover, who was smoking a cigar with a nonchalant air, moved forward a little.

"Don't trouble yourself on that score," he calmly directed. "I am Homer Addison!"

"What?"

"As a matter of business," calmly added the sport, "I will say that Homer Addison has called the game!"

"You jest."

"I never was more serious. I don't care a picayune for the money involved, but I am Warren's brother, as aforesaid. I have been a wanderer, myself, and long of the West. I knew of Warren's affairs before I came to Glory Gulch, but I did not intend to reveal myself. He and I had been strangers for fifteen years; I saw no reason why we should not continue so.

"I have been interested in this episode of Glory Gulch, however. It was interesting to have another man claim my identity and my inheritance, but I was not in haste to reveal myself. From the first I knew that Little Alf was a woman, and in love with my name-claimer. I saw her grief, too, so I have given her a helping hand. I charge nothing for it.

"Perhaps you notice that I don't resemble Warren Addison. Well, I never did. Yet I am his brother, Homer Addison, all the same. More than that need not be said. There will be no squabble over the money he left. If anybody wants me to take it, it's a go, for I am exactly what I claim. I'll not ask you to take this on my bare statement, for I can prove all I say, so we need not argue it now. It is a trifling affair, at best, and I shall remain Robert Rover, sport!"

The drama of Glory Gulch was soon ended. Pownall Gifford expiated his crimes at the hands of law. Mayor Everell came to Glory Gulch no more, for in the search on the mountains he had fallen from a cliff and lost his life. Bad Benson died, and the rest of the Gold-Dusters fled to other regions.

Roscoe Barclay recovered his health fully. The miners were chivalrous. They called for his full pardon, which was granted, and when he and Marcia left town it was as man and wife, and loaded with presents. In view of this outburst of generosity, it is pleasant to be able to add that Roscoe has since lived a life of scrupulous honesty, and that he and Marcia are happy.

Barachias Bee and Tommy Wrenn move serenely along their usual spheres of action.

The law adjusted the financial affairs of Gifford and West in the famous loan-

ing transaction, and decided them square. Peter worked Claim 47 until he died, making a fair living.

Before that day Dorothy and Frisco Frank had more than one long talk. The ultimate result was that they were united in marital bonds. It is said they make a model couple.

Robert Rover fully proved his claim, but he took a sudden fancy to hand his inheritance over to charity. This he did, and then he drifted away, nobody in Glory Gulch knew where.

THE END.

NEXT DIME LIBRARY, NUMBER 932!

Detective Gordon's Grip.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

Beadle's Dime Library.

BUFFALO BILL NOVELS.

By Colonel Prentiss Ingraham.

- 927 Buffalo Bill's Bluff; or, Ducky Dick the Sport.
- 921 Buffalo Bill's Quandary; or, Velvet Bill's Vow.
- 915 Buffalo Bill and the Surgeon-Scout.
- 909 Buffalo Bill's League; or, Red Butterfly.
- 904 Buffalo Bill's Tangled Trail.
- 900 Buffalo Bill's Rough Riders.
- 895 Buffalo Bill's Secret Ally.
- 890 Buffalo Bill's Life-Stroke.
- 882 The Three Bills; Buffalo Bill Wild Bill and Band-box Bill; or, The Bravo in Broadcloth.
- 874 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Braves.
- 869 Buffalo Bill's Road-Agent Round-up.
- 863 Buffalo Bill's Death Charm.
- 857 Buffalo Bill's Royal Flush.
- 851 Buffalo Bill's Double Dilemma.
- 845 Buffalo Bill's Redskin Ruse.
- 830 Buffalo Bill's Boys in Blue.
- 826 Buffalo Bill's Sharp Shooters.
- 822 Buffalo Bill's Best Bower.
- 816 Buffalo Bill's Red Trail.
- 812 Buffalo Bill's Death-Knell.
- 794 Buffalo Bill's Winning Hand.
- 787 Buffalo Bill's Dead Shot.
- 781 Buffalo Bill's Brand.
- 777 Buffalo Bill's Spy Shadower.
- 769 Buffalo Bill's Sweepstake.
- 765 Buffalo Bill's Dozen; or, Silk Ribbon Sam.
- 761 Buffalo Bill's Mascot.
- 757 Buffalo Bill's Double.
- 750 Buffalo Bill's Big Four; or, Custer's Shadow.
- 743 Buffalo Bill's Flush Hand.
- 739 Buffalo Bill's Blind; or, The Masked Driver.
- 735 Buffalo Bill and His Merry Men.
- 731 Buffalo Bill's Beagles; or, Silk Lasso Sam.
- 727 Buffalo Bill's Body Guard.
- 722 Buffalo Bill on the War-path.
- 716 Buffalo Bill's Scout Shadowers.
- 710 Buffalo Bill Baffled; or, The Deserter Desperado.
- 697 Buffalo Bill's Buckskin Brotherhood.
- 691 Buffalo Bill's Blind Trail; or, Mustang Madge.
- 667 Buffalo Bill's Scoop; or, The King of the Mines.
- 658 The Cowboy Clan; or, The Tigress of Texas.
- 653 Lasso King's League; or, Buck Taylor in Texas.
- 649 Buffalo Bill's Chief of Cowboys; or, Buck Taylor.
- 644 Buffalo Bill's Lariat; or, Silver Circle Knights.
- 632 Buffalo Bill's Grip; or, Oath Bound to Custer.
- 329 Buffalo Bill's Pledge; or, The League of Three.
- 189 Wild Bill's Gold Trail; or, The Desperate Dozen.
- 175 Wild Bill's Trump Card; or, The Indian Heiress.
- 168 Wild Bill, the Pistol Dead Shot.

By Buffalo Bill.

- 839 The Ranch King Dead-Shot.
- 820 White Beaver's Still Hunt.
- 807 Wild Bill, the Wild West Duelist.
- 830 Wild Bill, the Dead-Center Shot.
- 639 Buffalo Bill's Gold King.
- 599 The Dead Shot Nine; or, My Pard of the Plains.
- 414 Red Renard, the Indian Detective.
- 401 One-Armed Pard; or, Borderland Retribution.
- 397 The Wizard Brothers; or, White Beaver's Trail.
- 394 White Beaver, the Exile of the Platte.
- 319 Wild Bill, the Whirlwind of the West.
- 304 Texas Jack, the Prairie Rattler.
- 243 The Pilgrim Sharp; or, The Soldier's Sweetheart.
- 89 Gold Bullet Sport; or, Knights of the Overland.
- 52 Death-Trail, the Chief of Scouts.

By Leon Lewis, Ned Buntline, etc.

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